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# the christian SCHOLAR



## BIBLICAL THEOLOGY

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## THE CHRISTIAN SCHOLAR

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The purpose of the Commission on Christian Higher Education is to develop basic philosophy and requisite programs within its assigned field; to awaken the entire public to the conviction that religion is essential to a complete education and that education is necessary in the achievement of progress; to foster a vital Christian life in college and university communities of the United States of America; to strengthen the Christian college, to promote religious instruction therein, and to emphasize the permanent necessity of higher education under distinctly Christian auspices.

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# The Christian Scholar

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VOLUME XXXIX

NUMBER 1

MARCH, 1956

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## TABLE OF CONTENTS

	<i>Page</i>
The Editor's Preface .....	3
ADAM AND THE EDUCATOR ..... <i>Paul Minear</i>	6
A CHRISTIAN UNDERSTANDING OF REVELATION ..... <i>Albert T. Mollegen</i>	19
BIBLICAL FAITH AS <i>HEILSGESCHICHTE</i> ..... <i>Will Herberg</i>	25
MYSTICAL VS. BIBLICAL SYMBOLISM ..... <i>E. LaB. Cherbonnier</i>	32
CREATION ..... <i>Walter Harrelson</i>	45
THE BIBLICAL UNDERSTANDING OF MIRACLE ..... <i>Howard Kee</i>	50
GOD'S PEOPLE ISRAEL, THE CHURCH AND THE WORLD ..... <i>Joseph Haroutunian</i>	56
PROGRESSIVE REVELATION ..... <i>George Ernest Wright</i>	61
THE BIBLICAL ETHIC OF OBEDIENCE ..... <i>Bernhard W. Anderson</i>	66
CHRISTOLOGY—AS A PROBLEM OF TRANSLATION ..... <i>Krister Stendahl</i>	72
BOOKS AND PUBLICATIONS	
An Annotated Bibliography on Biblical Theology .....	77
<i>From Faith to Faith</i> by B. Davie Napier ..... <i>R. B. Y. Scott</i>	82

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## To the readers of The Christian Scholar

Dear Friends:

We recently took you into our confidence and revealed the serious problems and difficulties with which we are faced in the continuation of the publication of the *Scholar*. We did this because we felt that there is a shared sense of concern in a community of those who greatly value and highly appreciate basic thinking in the area of the Christian faith and higher education. The response has been most encouraging and gratifying and it is only fair that we let you know what has happened. Here are some of the elements:

First, so many of you have expressed yourselves as being concerned over the continuation of the *Scholar* and have commented on its work and importance that you have confirmed our own feeling that every effort must be made to continue publication. You have made it clear that we do not stand alone and thus we can move forward with increased confidence and incentive.

Secondly, you have made a number of individual and institutional gifts amounting to a total of some \$500.00. Aware that the readers of the *Scholar* are rarely in the upper economic bracket, this is particularly appreciated and a further boost to morale.

Thirdly, the Division of Christian Education of the National Council of Churches is standing behind us by not holding our deficits against us in the coming year. This enables us to start off 1956 with a clean slate. In addition, denominational leaders of higher education are expressing themselves as believing in the *Scholar* and recognizing the fact that it will probably need continued support in the form of subsidy, they are taking steps to assure some degree of this form of assistance. One denomination has sent a substantial

check in support of this conviction.

Fourthly a number have sent in subscriptions either for themselves or for friends. One lady sent the money for two sample copies to be sent to friends of hers together with an invitation to subscribe. We recommend this personal kind of promotion.

Fifthly, we are seeking a special gift that will enable us to develop a larger circulation over the next two or three years through a more effective promotion campaign. If this can be obtained and a substantial number of new subscriptions at the increased price secured, we will have moved a long way toward solving our problems. We are quite aware that the *Scholar* will always have to be subsidized some by its friends, but we are anxious to keep that to a minimum and are studying again our publishing costs and all other items of expense.

A further development of interest to you is the way in which the Editorial Board has expressed its willingness to help out in the business and promotion aspects of the *Scholar* as well as the editorial content. Thus, we hope to have some continued guidance on this phase of our responsibility.

As I said earlier, this whole experience has confirmed our feeling that we do not stand alone, but that behind us is a community of those who want to see creative thinking in the realm of Christian higher education move forward at the most profound level possible. This is a most encouraging feeling, spiritually as well as practically. We extend our grateful thanks to you.

Very sincerely,

Hubert C. Noble,

General Director  
Commission on Christian  
Higher Education

*[The text in this section is extremely faint and illegible. It appears to be a multi-paragraph document, possibly a letter or a report, with several lines of text visible across the page.]*

## Editor's Preface

When publication of *The Christian Scholar* was begun—exactly three years ago with this issue—the claim was made that this journal would be “devoted to a full exploration of the meaning of Christian faith and thought, as expressed in the current theological renaissance, in relation to the whole range of the intellectual life and to the whole task of higher education.” We noted then that what has so often been termed the “theological renaissance” refers us largely, though not exclusively, to the rediscovery of the Gospel in our biblical heritage. This has “spilled over”, as it were, far beyond the limits of academic theology itself, for the renaissance has its promise particularly in the fact that some of the “best minds” in every area of human thought converge currently upon the quest for that expression and form of Christian faith which may serve as the intellectual foundation for all areas of scholarly inquiry. Both the search for the authentic dimensions of the Gospel, and the attempt to state it significantly and relevantly as a comprehensive and unifying philosophy of human civilization—or at least as a newly-discovered alternative to “the cures which never cure”—are currently engaged in with new vigor and power.

During the past three years (thirteen issues, more than twelve hundred pages, a hundred or more articles and reviews!) we have tried to follow the course of presenting materials which reflected this new frontier of Christian faith and scholarship. Diverse points of view, and a variety of suggested answers have been presented; we have avoided a party-line, except that we were in search

of illumination within the conversation between “Christian” and “scholar.” Some have warned us that we were too hopeful in our search; others have fretted lest we should forget that there are practical tasks to work at—answers to delineate for a Christian teacher, programs to get rolling for the Christian ministry in higher education, solutions to describe for church-related colleges, and the rest. There was discontent with so vast an aim as we embarked upon among those who said we were “up in the clouds,” that the material was “too difficult going” for the average reader, and that we were too “theological.”

The problems we have faced have been real and they have been hard—a fact of which we have been constantly reminded by the large deficits in our budget! There were temptations to become “popular,” to work out the easy solutions in early stages of the conversation and to ignore the leading of the Spirit “into all Truth,” to avoid the more difficult task of theology—the task of thinking and “living” through the implications and meaning of the Christian Gospel in the academic community. We have, as you note by our new “dress,” decided on some revisions in our format. We hope that you approve, and, if not, that you will forgive us our “coming of age.” (It has been a long, hard struggle!) But, the change in format is by no means a symbol of any wavering in our primary objective. In fact, the first design already suggests, without apologies, that “the Christian scholar” cannot be exempted from the hard job of theologian.

Confronting the demands of the task head-on, this issue is an effort to make more explicit the biblical perspective which provides the "orientation," or at least the foundations, of a recognizably Christian world-view. Perhaps we should use the plural, perspectives, for certainly this issue is itself evidence of the fact that any ten men—even though they are good biblical scholars—will see different things as they penetrate into the Bible, read it "interiorly," and then seek to look out from its unique world. The biblical literature is itself a rich diversity, and to talk about "the unity of the Bible" is as much a statement of a problem as it is the suggesting of a solution. Yet, there is something of a unity so that we may speak of "our biblical faith"; it has behind it a common set of presuppositions concerning God, his revelation and purposes, man, his existence both as creature and sinner, and the world, its dependence and its involvement in the reconciliation which is by Christ. An outline of emphases, a common structural framework, and a unity of focus upon God's work as it is seen in dramatic history—at least these are to be found within what is quite evidently a collection of books, a library, which we call the Holy Scriptures, and which may be entered at a diverse number of points.

We have two purposes in mind in this issue. The first is to define as clearly as we can what we mean by the biblical standpoint or standpoints, out of which this journal seeks to speak. And, secondly, to elaborate this definition in a way which speaks particularly to the intellectual community. To some this may

sound like some form of Protestant "scholasticism." One of our most faithful and critical readers, when he was asked for counsel concerning this issue—a stout defender of theologians too!—was far from reassured by our plans. In his own picturesque words, he said "you can stack Eichrodt and Cullmann on the top of all nine volumes of Barth's *Dogmatik* and still have no *engagement* with the lay-intellectual. . . . I fear this series will not be relevant. . . . Theologians—with a few striking exceptions—*cannot be trusted* on the loose in their own field! They are just as irresponsible towards the great parish of intellectuals whom we wish to reach as philosophers who devote their time to word-analysis." (*Italics his.*)

Taking this advice seriously, we asked our authors to concentrate primarily on the second of our objectives, *i.e.*, to become "theological laymen" and to write about the way the intellectual landscape looks to them through biblical perspectives. There may be some lapsing here—shining up the perspectives again!—but we are intending this as an engagement with major biblical themes for "lay-intellectuals." How we may find the Bible to speak to us in our modern intellectual milieu is difficult, to say the least. The language and thought forms are foreign and often non-communicative. Bultmann has blamed it on an old, and ultimately impermanent, mythological system, from which the Gospel itself can be extricated so that its pertinence and urgency as a message for our day may be visible again. Barth, on the other hand, has tried to save the Gospel from "the

## EDITOR'S PREFACE

acids of modernity"; he has rejected historical criticism in order to isolate the skandalon of Jesus Christ. Both have been critical of fundamentalism, and of creations and definitions of religion by intellectual syncretisms, yet both have recognized that a primary problem is that of the distance between the biblical and the modern world. In the words of Karl Heim: "The Church is like a ship in whose deck festivities are still kept up and glorious music is heard, while deep below the waterline a leak has been sprung and masses of water are pouring in, so that the vessel is settling hourly lower, though the pumps are manned day and night."<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Karl Heim, *Christian Faith and Natural Science* (London, 1953), p. 24.

The contemporary theological task is certainly not to add diversions from the real facts, to provide more festivities on the deck, more glorious music, but to go below deck ready to discover and use the weapons of repair. But this involves more than a resurgence of critical biblical scholarship; it involves in addition and perhaps more urgently, defining the understanding of man's place in the world, and of God's work in the world, as the Bible understands these things—and in language which is once again full of meaning!

(Note: A special word of appreciation should be expressed to Dr. Bernhard W. Anderson, a member of our Editorial Board, who gave of his wisdom and insight to the preparation of this special issue on Biblical Theology.)

## A New Feature

Because *The Christian Scholar* is intended to stimulate dialogue among members of the communities in the colleges and universities, as well as in relation to the Christian Church, the proposal has been made that we should carry a regular feature, "Letters to the Editor." We have appreciated receiving from many of our readers their reactions

to a given issue, to our general approach to questions of immediate concern, and to specific articles or reviews.

It is our intention to institute this new feature of disclosing some of the dialogue which our contents stimulate in forthcoming issues. We trust that the letters will deal explicitly with both critical and appreciative aspects of the readers' response to this publication.

## A Word From The Cover Artist

Many contemporary designers find themselves gradually forced to dilute artistic expression until its form has lost all power of creative insight and conscience. The demands made upon the graphic artist to coax audiences into identifying with glib superficialities are so great that unless the artist conforms to these demands his work will only rarely be printed. Speaking as a designer who wishes not to forfeit thought—either in form or content, I am grateful to the Editorial Board of *The Christian Scholar* for the opportunity to try to create designs in the freedom and pursuit of truth to which the journal is committed.

Gregor Thompson Goethals

## Adam and the Educator

PAUL S. MINEAR



AS WE READ THE BIBLE, we discover that it presents to us not so much doctrines about man as pictures of men. A doctrine calls for analysis and argument, agreement or disagreement; it prompts in us the attempt to correlate this doctrine with many others. A picture calls for imagination, for recognition, for inner reflection; it prompts a subconscious comparison with actual life—situations as seen from within. Moreover, the pictures of the Bible are given to us in the form not of portraits but of stories. These story-pictures depict man's nature in terms of the sequence of his decisions. The context for each decision is defined by his freedom in its inner and outer relation to God and to other men. Each story-picture of the Bible has both breadth and depth; breadth, in that it represents the experience of many men; depth, in that it represents the inner struggles of every man. Thus, in commenting on the Cain and Abel story, one of the characters in John Steinbeck's *East Of Eden* says, "A great story is about everyone or it will not last. The strange and foreign is not interesting—only the deeply personal and familiar. . . . No story has power, or will it last, unless we feel in ourselves that it is true and true of us". The stories of the Bible, however, do more than mirror the human situation; they are the medium for personal encounter. Each reader is confronted by a personal image to which he must react, either positively or negatively. This reaction becomes an act of recognition, an act of imaginative identification. Discovering himself in the picture, he is prompted to confess his participation in the story.

Thus it is that the biblical story of Adam becomes a part of our story. In this Man, we are enabled to confess the basic goodness of God's creative work: "So God created man in his own image". At the same moment we are enabled to confess the subterranean yet undeniable connections between Adam's sin and our own, and to accept the justice of Adam's expulsion from Eden. To be sure, we may not be able to see ourselves fully in this mirror, but we can see with clarity sufficient to recognize our participation in both the glory and the sin of Adam.

The books of the New Testament are dominated by picture-stories of the one who fulfilled the role of a second Adam, the new Man. On occasion this analogy is explicit: "As in Adam all died, so in Christ shall all be made alive". More often the analogy remains implicit in the stories. He, too, is created in the image of God and receives the fullness of the divine glory. Whoever has seen him has seen his Father. He, too, is intended as the image of a new humanity so that God's glory may flow through him into all creation. He comes as the first of many sons and brothers. The intimate associations that link this Man to all who receive his life are explicitly set forth in the New Testament. Like master, like servant. The recognition of kinship, to be sure, is possible only to those who are reborn. The

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## ADAM AND THE EDUCATOR

glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ is manifest only to those who are being transformed into his likeness. This transformation is accompanied by a new awareness of kinship to the first Man by way of sin. It is also accompanied by the confession of obligation to put off the old man and to put on the new. This confession of obligation is inseparable from the confession of hope, the confidence that God will complete the good work which he has begun: the adoption of sons and the fulfillment of their rightful inheritance.

The Christian thus recognizes himself in the stories of both the first and the second Adam. He inherits both the image of disobedience and the image of perfect obedience, but he also inherits the divine promise that the second will triumph over the first. Until that promise is fulfilled there is a bitter conflict between the two. Among the many traits of the old Adam which have not yet been overcome is the habit of relying upon deceptive pictures of himself. The world is permeated by these patterns. Among them are those that dominate educational theory and practice. Between these pictures and the image of the new Man there are inherent contradictions. These mark the frontier where the man of faith is summoned to stand. Here he is reborn according to the measure of his faith; by the same measure he is able to recognize and to do battle with the forces of rebellion that are masked behind persuasive theories of human nature.

We all participate as Christians in this struggle, although the exact contour of the battle-line may be difficult to draw. It is obvious that the area of conflict will shift as we move from one educational system to another. In some the picture of man that dominates totalitarian nationalisms will be primary; in others the subordination of the individual to the collective "economic man" will be more latent and implicit. Some systems are openly anti-Christian, some professedly neutral, some self-consciously Christian. There is no single doctrine of education that can exclusively claim the epithet "modern." There are many theories of education and each has its own conception of human nature. These conceptions may vary even as we move from the primary schools to the universities, or from the classroom to the superintendent's office. But there is one place where all the lines of conflict meet,—in the thought and work of the Christian educator. Whatever his system and whatever his function in that system, he experiences the biblical conflict between the old Adam and the new in the form of a struggle between the picture of sonship revealed in Christ and the pictures cherished by his contemporaries, who express their desires through the schools. In exploring this conflict in the life of the educator, we probe to a level deeper than the more obvious differences among educational systems. To the extent that he is both a Christian and an educator, this person stands on the frontier between the Gospel and the world. On the one hand he is open to the Gospel promises and commands, to the God who has claimed his total loyalty and who is the sole source of truth. On the other hand he is open to the desires and demands of a world that does not recognize this God or his Man. This frontier penetrates every cranny in the existence of the



educator as man. He may first become conscious of it in the debate over rival pedagogical theories, over curricular organization, or over the role of the State in education. Sooner or later, however, he feels the sword of the Spirit "piercing to the division of soul and spirit . . . and discerning the thoughts and intentions of the heart" (Heb. 4:12). The competition among various anthropologies is embodied most directly in his attitudes toward himself as both teacher and taught, and toward those with whom he has most intimately to deal. As the biblical image of the one true man exerts its mysterious constraint, he will discover enemies as well as friends within his own heart.

Let us then explore some of the points on this frontier, beginning with what is perhaps the most basic of all—the conception of life itself. Most of our contemporaries seem to take for granted a clear knowledge of what life is. But actually this word is far from self-explanatory and unambiguous. Consider Pascal's assertion: "Not only do we know God only through Jesus Christ; but only through him do we know ourselves. Through him we know life and death. Outside him we know neither life, nor death, nor God, nor ourselves". (S. de Dietrich, *Interpretation*, 1952, p. 394). Such an assertion may sound strange to modern ears, but it is authentically biblical. Within the New Testament, life is viewed as that relationship to God and to our fellows that is created, sustained, nourished and consummated in Christ. "This is eternal life," writes the Evangelist, "that they know thee the only true God and Jesus Christ whom thou hast sent" (John 17:3). "It is no longer I who live," writes the Apostle, "but Christ who lives in me" (Gal. 2:20). Thus to live by faith in the Son of God is as different from what usually passes for life as being is from non-being (Rom. 4:17; I Cor. 1:28). In fact, life according to the flesh is explicitly termed death. True life begins in a new birth, a far more radical transition than the first birth. It is nourished by bread, a heavenly manna, that provides sufficiency even in time of famine. This life has no end: "whoever lives and believes in me shall never die" (John 11:26). The new man therefore does not fear death. Oh, to be sure, he may reckon with the end of his earthly existence, but he knows that "whether we live or whether we die, we are the Lord's" (Rom. 14:8). Because the Lord has overcome death, death can never destroy the relationship to the Crucified in whom is life. The only genuine death is that death which enters through Adam's sin. In Christ and with Christ man dies to this sin and its fruit. This voluntary dying *to* sin overcomes the just punishment of dying *in* sin. The same apostle who could say, "Sin revived and I died" could also say, "dying, and behold we live" (Rom. 7:9; II Cor. 6:9). This, then, is the image of life presented in the New Testament. The new man through faith dies to every form of the world's slavery and lives in the freedom of the Lord. Very expressive of the new man are the prepositions: he lives *in* the Lord, *through* the Lord, *for* the Lord, and *to* the Lord.

How different are the conceptions of life that dominate the modern mind! How does life begin and how does it end? For some it begins in physical birth

and is terminated by physical death. For some it begins and ends in the amorphous collective. For some it emerges from and returns to the life of "nature." How is life measured? By possessions, by security, by independence, by achievement, by the wealth or emptiness of its creation. By enjoyment or utility or wisdom or power. Every educational theory and every system of practice presupposes some conception of life, its origin and destiny and criteria. Usually this conception is inarticulate because most cultures take life simply as a given fact. Yet in all these conceptions, whether articulate or not, the New Testament discerns the solidarity between school and world, for the world is that realm wherein life is viewed in terms other than those disclosed in Christ. All this leads to the query: Can any school system as such succeed in inculcating the Christian understanding of what life is, or is this understanding communicated solely by the Crucified Christ in his gift of life through faith?

However this query may be answered in theory, the Christian teacher actually finds himself working in a system that is at odds with the Gospel on this point. The resulting tension will be keenest in his own mind and heart. In his acceptance of God's grace he has become a member of the Body of righteousness and life, an heir of life eternal. In acceptance of the prevailing patterns of community thinking, he shares "the body of sin and death". His motives will be affected by current anxieties that stem from the fear of non-being. His desires will be conditioned by current measurements of the goals of being. He will identify his future with the destiny of institutions that bear the mark of transiency, all the while they claim for themselves the assurance of permanence. The more fully he recognizes the tension between these dual loyalties, the more clearly will he see what it means to stand within the eschatological crisis. The more explicitly he proclaims this crisis to his fellow-educators and their common world, the more clearly will he come to understand how and why the world always rejects the second Adam.

Participation in this struggle leads to an awareness of another crucial point on the frontier, a point that can be located by the use of the term hope. Hope is an essential constituent of the concept of life, and therefore an element in every anthropology. In the Christian view of man there is an ultimate truth in the proverb "While there's life, there's hope," but this proverb is true only of the new life in Christ. Where there is a new man, there is hope. Men who are separated from Christ are without God in the world, and consequently have no hope (Eph. 2:12). They are of course driven by all the wishes and desires of the flesh and the world, yet they are essentially without hope. The world has a multiplicity of contradictory hopes, but the new humanity has but one. This hope belongs intrinsically and inseparably to its calling, since its ground is one God, one Lord, one Spirit, one body, one baptism (Eph. 4:4-6). This hope is a gift of the Spirit, a response to "this grace in which we stand" (Rom. 5:2; I Cor. 13:13-14:1). This hope is a mark of the new inheritance as sons of God, an inheritance that has already changed our status from alien to citizen in God's kingdom. "The hope of sharing the glory

## THE CHRISTIAN SCHOLAR

of God" begins with "Christ in you the hope of glory" and points toward the fullness of glory in the redemption of the body and in the glorification of all creation (Rom. 5:2; Col. 1:27; Rom. 8:18-25). Of this hope faith is the substance; of this hope the life of a pilgrim is the visible expression (Heb. 11). "Hope is commonly used to mean a wish: its strength is the strength of the person's desire. But in the Bible hope is the confident expectation of what God has promised and its strength is in His faithfulness" (Second Report of the Advisory Commission on the Theme of the Second Assembly of the World Council of Churches, p. 4) In short, the Christian does not view his hope as something bounded by time; rather he sees the whole time of his pilgrimage, yes, and the whole time of creation, as bounded by this hope in God's promise,

Is this the hope by which the world lives? Is this what provides the motivation for the establishment and support of school systems? Is this the central desire inculcated in our students? Does this hope provide the standard by which curricula are judged in an anxious and insecure society? Do nations at war test the loyalty and ability of teachers by their fidelity to this hope? The most obvious answer would be a categorical No. In our day this No is pronounced most explosively by the world, not by the Church. The Church must be careful not to make its No too emphatic or exclusive, for the Church should realize that God's promise does extend to the whole of his creation. The existence of the world is sustained by his power; its destiny is assured by his righteous love. There is an ultimate hope for that world for which Jesus died. Yet this ultimate hope for the world poses even more sharply the conflict between the Christian's hope and those hopes that the world consciously invests in its schools. Each school is viewed as a means toward the supremacy and survival of that group which supports it. In a pluralistic society there are as many separate hopes as there are persons, as many collective hopes as there are groups that are bound by ties of race and class, religion and culture. Each group finds in its distinctive hope its very justification for existing. At the core of every social estrangement there lies a conflict of hopes. From this central conflict spring the fears that bedevil existence; the more demanding the hope, the more controlling the fear. And out of the fears spring the cruelties of prejudice and the brutalities of the struggle for survival. Dreams of one world are shattered by the fact of multiple, competing hopes. Both the dreams and their frustrations are mirrored in educational institutions, and in their theories and practices.

Whether he realizes its full implications or not, the Christian educator stands on the frontier between the one hope in Christ and the hopes of the world. In one sense, this one hope makes him a foreigner in his native habitat—the school. In another sense he may be more at home in the school than is the non-Christian teacher. The latter is never content with the school, because its results are never sufficiently in line with the realization of his worldly hope. The Christian, by con-

trast, lives by the confidence that Christ is able to redeem even the situation where he seems to be most savagely rejected. In this case his at-homeness in the school will indicate foreignness at a deeper level. And both foreignness and at-homeness are intrinsic to the life of the pilgrim whose strength and endurance is provided by "the one hope that belongs to your calling." It will not be strange if he finds that his pilgrimage as a teacher is accompanied by learning how inevitable and deep are the conflicts between the hope in God and the hopes of the world. There was a time in which controversies over rival faiths were most virulent in the school systems, but teachers belonging to these faiths have learned to work together. Perhaps we are moving again into a period in which the incompatibility of rival hopes will become more apparent and more productive of strife. In the New Testament period the announcement of the Christian hope was the most dangerous invitation to persecution (Acts 26:6, 7). Every Christian was expected to be prepared to give a confession of the *hope* that was in him. No doubt Christians were then looked upon as haters of the human race because of this hope. Educators who live by this hope will have occasion to discover whether the world (as seen through its schools) has really become more friendly to Christ as its only hope.

In the New Testament one expression of the measure of man is this: "the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ." The Son of God is the image of "mature manhood" (Eph. 4:13). The Body of this new Man is bound together by one hope, as we have seen. We should now comment on the way in which this one hope belongs to one calling, that is to a single vocation. A man is known by his calling. God is the one who calls. Those whom he calls are absorbed within a single vocation: slave and master, citizen and king, husband and wife, rich and poor,—all these share the same vocation. Yet full account is taken of varieties of employment. "There are varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit; and there are varieties of service, but the same Lord; and there are varieties of working, but it is the same God who inspires them 'all in every one,'" (I Cor. 12:4-6) The Christian vocation is by nature trinitarian. By nature it embraces every expenditure of energy—in work and worship, thought and recreation, private activity and public. It covers every manifestation of the Spirit for the common good (I Cor. 12:7). Every deed of the new man is a sign of God at work both in the will and the deed (Phil. 2:13). Those who are called can never gloat over those who have not been called, because the call is a gift without regard to merit. God chooses the foolish, the weak, the illborn, "even the things that are not" (I Cor. 1:28) The apostle cannot gloat over the layman because the highest gifts of all are faith, hope and love. As God measured greatness of vocation, the slave of all became the king of all. This slave established the rule that the last should be first. His followers must therefore share his mission as Suffering Servant. The pattern of his ministry thus becomes authoritative for the vocation of his servants: to proclaim good news, to teach the will of God, to heal the sick, to cleanse lepers, to cast out demons, to gain life by losing it for others, to reconcile in one's own body the

## THE CHRISTIAN SCHOLAR

estrangements that pervade the world, to do everything for God's glory—that God in whose eyes a sparrow is not without value and two mites may be more wealth than millions of dollars. The life of the new Adam is coextensive with the actual pursuit of this vocation. To him in his rebirth a mission is given, a mission that is not fulfilled until humanity itself arrives at "mature manhood".

How different all this is from the sense of vocation instilled through its schools by the world! In the world there are many vocations, not one. For that very reason there are many spirits, many lords, many gods. In a real sense, every school is a vocational school, in which the young are prepared for the pursuit of greatness. The skills are those demanded by the culture; the ambitions are those that dominate that culture. Each school has its own way of discovering the student's gifts, of conditioning his desires, of measuring his progress, of calculating his success. His choice of vocation is one way of registering which god is to work in his work, which lord is to serve in his serving, which spirit is to provide his talents. This is all the more true where, in choosing his vocation, he ignores any relationship to God and calculates only on the basis of environmental opportunities and personal aptitudes. Such calculations will be comparative and competitive in nature, expressing the desire for superiority. The measure of success will be provided by those men whom the world considers greatest rather than the Man who was despised and rejected by the world. The Messiah's vocation always seems as strange to the scribes as to the priests, or to the procurator and his police.

The Christian teacher will therefore find himself living where the one vocation in Christ is at once most foreign to the world's idea of vocations and most relevant to the world's need. The work of teaching is at once a Christian vocation and a worldly profession. It is hard for him to distinguish the line between his desire for professional success and Christ's test of his obedience. To discern the line is made all the more difficult by the use of the same language (e.g. service) to describe both Christ's calling and the world's profession. What the world demands as service may be treason to Christ the Crucified, yet the world can not be trusted to know the difference. The educator meets this same problem in counseling his students on their vocational choices. In such counseling the various theories of human nature becomes quite determinative of vocational choices. The sensitive counselor will quickly discover how far contemporary patterns of vocational guidance diverge from New Testament standards, how sharply the claims of Christ compete with the claims of false Messiahs in this realm.

The picture-stories of the New Testament, as they present the life of the new Man with its one hope and one vocation, always convey a sense of progress and growth. The disciple is a plowman pressing patiently toward the end of the furrow, a runner hastening with all eagerness toward the tape. A constant movement forward is a necessity. The conflict between the Christian conception of man and contemporary educational theories is not a conflict over the necessity of progress



but over the measurement of progress. In what areas does the new man find growth to be imperative? Since life consists in knowledge of the one true God, growth in this knowledge must be sought. Since knowledge of God is inseparable from faith, an ever stronger faith is called for. Since faith is expressed in obedience, the new man makes a steady movement from lesser to greater obedience. Since faith works through love Christ summons his disciple to cultivate a more total love, and this requires a more intelligent love, and more effective methods of loving. The mind can always become more fit to serve as a temple of the Spirit. Each member of Christ's body may contribute to the greater unity of that body, and may participate more effectively in the mission of that body to the world. The pursuit of this mission entails a more complete sharing of the burdens of the world, and a more rich experience of the joy given to God's sons. The new life is sustained and surrounded by mystery, but there must be a more mature understanding of the mystery. The work of teachers in the Christian community is an absolute necessity. Each teacher must discern the difference between food appropriate for babes and food for the mature, and must learn how to guide each babe toward maturity. In this guidance he will constantly be learning from the example of him who both learned and taught perfect obedience through what he suffered.

As a Christian, then, the educator has access to these standards and measurements of growth. In his school, however, he is in daily contact with very different standards. He himself must meet certain standards before he is authorized to teach. His rating as a teacher will vary in accordance with his growing ability to meet the professional requirements. In the classroom, he must give examinations that periodically assess the growth of his students. Then he must utilize the results of these examinations in order to speed that development. Students and their parents will eagerly and anxiously await the ratings provided by the school. Special inducements accompany great progress; appropriate penalties are applied to those who make little progress. Whatever the procedures used in grading, those procedures will involve a comparison of each student with the others, a weighing of his work in terms of the teacher's goal for him, an assessment of his progress in accordance with the desires of society. At the end of the student's schooling, his composite and cumulative record is made available to society, to help it in determining his employment. Central in this whole process is the teacher's work as Judge. What standards will he apply in the measurement of growth? He may discover that at some points the standards of the world coincide with those of Christ. At other points these two standards may complement one another. They may run parallel without touching, the grades in mathematics having little to do with growth in grace. But in still other areas there will be acute and irreconcilable opposition. We may give two examples.

The first is the case of freedom. For the Christian, freedom is at once a gift and a goal: "For freedom Christ has set us free" (Gal. 5:1). Growth in the

## THE CHRISTIAN SCHOLAR

Christian life is growth in freedom:— freedom from Law, from sin, from death, from Satan, from the principalities and powers, "the rulers of this darkness." Now what are the instruments through which this slavery operates? Through the institutions of a given society, the best institutions (e.g., the Law) as through the worst. Most closely analogous to the Law, as taught by the scribes, are the modern principles of action as taught in school and church. Sin always works through what is good. Satan always extends his reign through the commendable and necessary organizations. The invisible powers exert their sovereignty through the prevailing mores and ideologies, as communicated through the schools. To be sure, a society encourages a certain degree of freedom; but it hedges this freedom about with definite limits. It must be restricted to areas within the "Law," within the accepted margins permitted by national security or economic self-sufficiency. The freedom encouraged in schools is always a limited freedom; Christ's freedom is unlimited, except by love. He frees men from the stereotypes of all institutions that seek at great cost to keep the liberties of men within control.

Consider for a moment the matter of racial and national freedom. The sign of Christ's freedom is this: "There cannot be Greek and Jew, circumcized and uncircumcized, barbarian, Scythian, slave, free man" (Col. 3:11). But in nations as we know them there are many distinctions: — between white and black, between capitalist and communist, between Catholic and Protestant. And in the schools as we know them most of these distinctions pertain. Today the American Christian needs to be told that growth in Christian freedom must be measured by progress toward actualizing this truth: In Christ both capitalist and communist are one! But what would happen were the Christian teacher to use his post in an American school for the purpose of extending this freedom? Protestant denominations are honest enough to confess in ecumenical conferences that, while we have an undeniable unity in Christ, we cannot yet demonstrate that we have a genuine unity in His Body the Church. Without this unity in His Body we cannot know the freedom which Christ grants from particularistic Law. If this is true of churches how much more true is it of Christians belonging to different races and nations. The Christian educator who glimpses the ultimate freedom in Christ will be compelled to recognize that in school systems as controlled by all modern states there is a tendency, implicit or explicit, toward totalitarian exclusiveness. He may also recognize that in school systems that are controlled by denominations there are also the same totalitarian tendencies. We do not yet share, even in our church schools, the freedom that enabled Paul to count "as loss for the sake of Christ" (Phil. 3:7) whatever gains he had received as a Hebrew and as a righteous Pharisee. We must all grow in freedom before we can follow his injunction: "Let those who have wives live as though they had none . . . and those who buy as though they had no goods, and those who deal with the world as though they had no dealings with it" (I Cor. 7:29-31). Educators who personally move forward toward this perfect freedom, and those



who teach others to seek it, will readily discover why it is that the New Testament pictures of the new Man always include another trait: growth in suffering.

The saga of the second Adam underscores the fact that he learned obedience through what he suffered (Heb. 5:8). God made the pioneer of our salvation perfect through suffering, and only thus was he able to bring many sons to glory (Heb. 2:10). The baptism of the new Man was a baptism into death; fellowship with him in his body meant fellowship with him in his dying. Those who followed him were called to renounce everything which they possessed, to deny themselves, to carry the same cross, to share the world's scorn and to bear the world's sin. This was a major item in his curriculum on the way to Golgotha, although his students did not learn it then. It was a central lesson of Golgotha, and the educative power of Golgotha is demonstrated in this: it communicated the truth to those who had hitherto been deaf. Henceforth they knew that growth in grace and obedience meant growth in love, and that growth in love meant advancement toward a total sacrifice. On the very eve of the Passion his students were still indoctrinated with the Gentile standards of greatness (Mk. 10:35-45). After the Passion they knew that progress in the new life meant progress toward becoming "slaves of all." This was why they could be so certain that no earthly disaster or trial could separate them from Him, because this was the Way that He had taken before them. Only a turning aside to an easier road would lead them away from that life which is born in the womb of death.

The more clearly we see this picture-story of the new vocation, the less do we need to argue how far contemporary educational practices diverge from it. Nor can church schools take much pride in being superior to secular schools in this regard. Church schools in fact are often more productive of confusion than secular schools, because they convey to their students a loyalty to Christ and at the same time conceptions of leadership that are antithetical to the vocation as slaves of all. One need not itemize prevailing conceptions of leadership in order to sense the contradictions to the image of the new Man. Schools measure growth by comparing the present status of each student with — what? With an ideal community leader or with the Suffering Servant? Do they encourage or discourage the desire for comparative pre-eminence? the desire for security and respectability? the desire for legal and social righteousness? the desire to be a good citizen of the world or to be a citizen of heaven? It should be obvious, not because of these paragraphs but because of the New Testament picture of the new life in Christ, that this conflict penetrates every school system. What is the function of the Christian educator in this conflict? One thing is certain. He will fulfill no function at all as a Christian unless he is keenly aware of the existence of the conflict. If he does not suffer from these contradictions more than does his non-Christian colleague, he will be unable to be a witness to the Gospel of the Crucified. Any

## THE CHRISTIAN SCHOLAR

effort to ignore or avoid *this* burden of the world's guilt would be a denial of his own baptism into Christ.

Another thing is sure: he will not fulfill his function within the school as a Christian unless his reactions to the situation are mastered by that love which enables the new Man to fulfill every law. Hostility toward his colleagues is ruled out because it is tantamount to murder (Mt. 5:22). Any resentment that stems from the difficulties of his own position would be a mark of self-love rather than neighbor-love. Branding his opponents as enemies would not conform to the mind of Christ. Secret thoughts about the school's debt to himself must be displaced by his spontaneous recognition of his own debt "to Jew and Gentile." His desire to grow in Christian obedience must be channeled through a voluntary acceptance of this very situation as the one to which he has been assigned by his Master. The very suffering that is implicit in his work will provide ample opportunity for him to discover the freedom in love that accompanies the life of the new Man.

Still another thing may be said with assurance. The Christian educator will be able to fulfill his function as Christian only within the context of the peace of God. The final word of the Gospel is not one of ceaseless struggle but of peace. This word is proclaimed both at the beginning and at the end of the ministry of every disciple. His first act of obedience enables him to say "Justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ" (Rom. 5:1). At the end of his pilgrimage lies God's promise of peace. All along the way he learns what it means to say "He is our peace" (Eph. 2:14). Moreover, by faith he knows that this very peace surrounds and sustains the total work of the Church, and, more important, the whole course of the world's history. Only this faith frees him sufficiently from himself so that he will serve in love, rejoice in suffering, and run with patience his particular race.

This peace, to be sure, is something that the world's schools cannot give. But neither can they take it away. The Christian educator will be increasingly aware of the huge chasm that separates this peace from that peace which the world covets. In love he will suffer because of the world's unappeased hunger for God's peace. When he enters a school he will learn that the school, either in its frenzied activities or its quiet complacencies, is seeking another kind of peace on quite different terms. But as a Christian he will also be a living witness to the truth that the total work of the school is set within the large and emancipating context of God's peace. His own witness to the truth will be a sign to the school of God's word in Christ: "Grace to you and peace . . .".

Perhaps we have said enough to indicate how sharp is the contrast, how pervasive the conflict, between the first and the second Adams in the work of a Christian educator. For a daily reminder of this conflict all the educator needs is the New Testament picture-story of the Christ. He is the one true Man. In him

is the only true life. We share in this life by dying daily. This new humanity is grounded in and oriented toward one promise and one hope. To this Man has been granted one mission, one vocation. This vocation provides both the norms and the means for growth — in faith, knowledge, obedience, suffering, love, freedom and joy. The goal is a more complete participation in the death and resurrection of Christ. The whole span of the new life is surrounded by God's peace.

Once the educator confronts the sharpness of this contrast he will inevitably ask what contributions the Christian may make to school systems in which the image of the first Adam provides the pattern and goal. In our answers we must be careful to preserve for Christian teachers that freedom in decision which the Gospel itself grants. No Christian teacher may dictate to another what obedience to Christ requires of him. "Who are you to pass judgment on the servant of another? It is before his own master that he stands or falls" (Rom. 14:4). Without denying freedom, however, we may risk a few generalities. The duty of the Christian educator should not follow the line of resentful criticism because the prevailing theory and practice do not accord with his own specifications. He need not seek primarily to turn every educational institution from its hostility or neutrality into full cooperation with the Church. Nor need he covet for himself a post in an institution that provides the most congenial atmosphere. Nevertheless, he should actively participate in the contemporary debates over rival educational theories. He should consider it his duty to articulate a Christian doctrine of man to set over against competing anthropologies. He should insist on the right of the Christian analysis of human nature to be heard in the open forum of the academic world. He should voice the school's inalienable responsibility to God at points where that responsibility requires the school to resist the particularistic prejudices of its constituency. He should struggle, as an expression of his freedom in Christ, to maintain and extend those lesser freedoms that are essential to genuine education. He will be unable to resign those valid responsibilities which are his as an educator, — to improve techniques of teaching, to revise curricula, to reorganize administrative policies. His personal obligation to become a better educator will not be diminished by his loyalty to Christ, even though his conceptions of education have been transformed by that loyalty. Whether his school be avowedly pagan or Christian, at the center of his work in that school he will erect an altar, and orient all of his responsibilities around this sanctuary.

All of his duties, and therefore all of his contributions, will flow from his participation in the life of the second Adam. He will define his own status, not so much by reference to his professional standing or his relationships to the school community, but by reference to what God has done for him in Christ. His status as "servant of all for Christ's sake" will retain its priority to his status as professor or principal. His lesser hopes as educator will derive their power from the one great hope as Christian. His ambitions for professional achievement will be kept

### THE CHRISTIAN SCHOLAR

under subjection to the one mission and the one calling. He will measure his own growth and that of his students by New Testament norms rather than by contemporary German, Dutch or American standards. He will live as a free man, grateful for this freedom as a gift of God's love and peace.

This means, of course, that there will be much need for that altar which he erects at the place of his daily work. The Cross on the altar will constantly remind him of the continuing conflict between God and his world, for the school is a place where Christ continues to suffer for the world. The death and resurrection of Christ disclose the points of sharpest cleavage between the two humanities. For this very reason, the altar will communicate to the Christian educator the meaning of his own vocation at the center of conflict. The altar will enable him to see his work, so far as it is responsive to Christ's, as the form in which his baptism is proceeding. With fear and trembling he may make the word of Jesus his own: "I have a baptism to be baptized with, and how am I constrained until it is accomplished" (Luke 12:50). At the same altar he may also find that his work, in a mysterious way, has become a part of his celebration of the Eucharist, where Christ's Body is broken for many. Perhaps nothing less than this will suffice to define the true Christian doctrine of man, since this very sacrifice is the way in which the Church was commanded to "proclaim the Lord's death until he come."

# A Christian Understanding of Revelation

ALBERT T. MOLLEGEN



EVELATION IN THE BIBLICAL AND Christian tradition, means the self-disclosure of the living God. Only in the archaic sense of the word *discovery* are *revelation* and *discovery* the same. In the modern sense of the word, *discovery* is descriptive of a human act which discerns something which is. The initiative comes from man; the discovered object is relatively passive. The Christian understanding of *revelation* insists that it is God who discovers (in the archaic sense of the word, i.e. discloses; uncovers) himself by his initiative without which there would be no knowledge of God.

A simple analogy of God's revelation is the revelation of a human person to other persons. Without self-disclosure the human person, as a person, is not accessible to empirical science. He is accessible, of course, to empirical observation as a physical object. As a falling body in a vacuum for instance, the human being has the same acceleration as a feather or a lead ball. So also as a living organism, a person is accessible to biological empirical observation. This observation gives us the science of human physiology.

But the person as a person, remaining passive, that is, without self-disclosure, is not accessible to empirical science. Inasmuch as any science deals with humans in their humanness, that science depends upon human self-disclosure for its existence. It is not possible without human self-revelation.

This fact is particularly self-evident in intensive psychotherapy or psychoanalysis. Since it is the human psyche which is to be healed, the psychotherapist is necessarily dependent upon the self-revelation of the patient. Without that, he is helpless. Unless the patient intentionally or unintentionally reveals himself, the therapist cannot treat the psychic malady. This is why those who are psychically ill are encouraged to reveal their depths by methods relevant to their condition. From drugs which produce abreaction to the complete "acceptance" of the analyst, the goal is the encouragement of the patient to unveil his depths. Only with such self-disclosure can there be any understanding of the malady which is somewhat comparable to medical diagnosis, an understanding which by the patient's "insight" becomes a part of the healing process.

The human person is known only through his self-revelation. This clearly evident fact is analogous to the biblical understanding of God. God cannot be known by any human science since his selfhood is inaccessible except by self-disclosure. Empirical observation of the universe, including the moral and religious history of man, could never prove either the existence or character of God. At best, these arguments for the existence and character of God can only make God

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a reasonable hypothesis. A biblical understanding of revelation says with Augustine, "We are united by faith, quickened by understanding. Let us first adhere to Him through faith, that there may be that which may be quickened by understanding"<sup>1</sup> "Faith" here, of course, means participation in, by response to, the divine revelation. Again we may use a human analogy. A person is truly known only by one who receives that person's self-disclosure in community with him. Revelation of God, likewise, is always *received* revelation, revelation participated in by someone or some group. An unreceived revelation would not be known about until it is received.

If one is serious, therefore, about knowing God, one must give serious attention to the traditions which stem from revelation. To seek God apart from religious traditions is like looking for apples on orange trees. It is not very profound to conclude that because no apples are to be found on orange trees, there are no apples. Apples usually appear on apple trees; God usually appears in the context of the religious traditions and the believing (faith-giving) communities. The religious tradition of Christianity is a result of the revelation of God in a series of self-disclosures in the continuous history of a faithful community, first Israel and then the new Israel, the Church. In one sense the Bible is only the record of the revelations of God culminating in the revelation in Christ. In another sense the recorders participated in these revelations and themselves became recipients of revelation based upon the original revelations. In a similar but secondary way the revelation of God, based upon the Biblical revelations, continues in the life of the Church.

The question naturally arises about the relationship of the Christian revelation and all the other revelations. The world surrounding the early Church recognized three kinds of religious peoples; the pagans, the Jews and the Christians. They called the Christians "a third race." The Christians ultimately accepted this designation with their own interpretation of it since they, too, recognized themselves as distinct from Jew and Gentile. This means that there are three basic types of revelation to be related, the non-Jewish, the Jewish and the Christian. Christianity sees these as stages which are related dialectically. The Jewish (prophetic would be a wider category) revelation presupposes and transforms the pagan revelation; the Christian revelation presupposes and transforms the Jewish revelation. Broadly speaking the pagan revelation is one in which the divine appears; the Jewish revelation is the one in which God appears as the one and only God whose righteousness falls as an unbearable demand on his people; the Christian revelation is the one in which God appears as Jesus Christ who saves man from the intolerable situation which he sees as a Jew.

The cumulative revelation of God in its own history brought Judaism to an understanding of man's problem as that of sin. Paganism understood the problem

<sup>1</sup>Tractate XXVII, 7. On the Gospel of St. John.



## A CHRISTIAN UNDERSTANDING OF REVELATION

to be that of creaturely frailty and mortality and sought immortality from God. True to biblical revelation, the early Church fathers from Orenaeus to Augustine maintained that man dies because he sins, a truth which needs careful apologetic statement to the modern man who knows death chiefly in the context of evolution and biology but seeks to evade facing existential or human death almost as much as he evades facing sin.

Jesus' summary of the Jewish Law poses the real nature of man's problem. He is commanded by God to fulfill his created nature by loving God with his whole being and his neighbor as himself, that is, as the self who loves God first and with the whole of his human powers. While the Golden Rule is commentary on Jesus' second commandment, Jesus' summary goes beyond it by commanding not only that man behave as if he loves but that he love out of his deepest inner nature. This clearly is an impossible commandment for man of himself to obey. For the self which does not love cannot will itself to love as it ought. Man cannot love God or his fellows because he knows that he ought to love them. The seventh chapter of the Epistle to the Romans, therefore, unveils the depth and the nature of the Jewish problem which is the problem of all men, recognized only within Judaism. This explains why the Church always takes the Old Testament with it as it approaches the pagan with the Gospel or even as it educates its own members. The problem of salvation is the problem of human sinfulness and impotence. Salvation is a divine miracle not a human possibility apart from God. This hard truth was put simply by Jesus.

"But Jesus said to them again, 'Children, how hard it is to enter the kingdom of God!' And they were exceedingly astonished, and said to him, 'Then who can be saved?' Jesus looked at them and said, 'With men it is impossible, but not with God; for all things are possible with God.'"<sup>2</sup>

This divine salvation was brought by God in Christ reconciling the world unto himself. This is the Good News, the Gospel. A first century Jew, Jesus of Nazareth, is the fully human, living sacrament of God's action; he is the perfect union of God and man which does not metamorphose God into man or man into God. Concretely and particularly in Palestine in the first century, through one who was born, suffered, died, went to the place of the departed, was raised and communicated his Spirit to the faithful, God loved man into an answering love.

"In this, the love of God was made manifest among us, that God sent his only Son into the world, so that we might live through him."

"In this is love, not that we loved God but that he loved us and sent his Son to be the expiation for our sins."

"Beloved, if God so loved us, we also ought to love one another".

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<sup>2</sup>Mark 10: 24-27.



"We love because he first loved us".<sup>3</sup>

So St. John describes the heart of the Christian Gospel, a revelatory action of God, personal, concrete, historical and work-doing. God in Christ elicits from man a love toward God and toward his fellows which was beyond his power to achieve yet which it is his true nature to have. Since no creaturely power "will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus," the consummation of that love is certain.

"Beloved, we are God's children now; it does not yet appear what we shall be, but we know that when he (Christ) appears we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is."<sup>4</sup>

The classical tradition in Christianity has never maintained that the revelation of God in Christ is absolutely exclusive. It does maintain, however, that the revelation in Christ not only fulfills but also negates the Jewish revelation which itself fulfills and negates the pagan revelation.

Another serious question about the Christian understanding of revelation is posed by the rise of critical science. Since God's revelation is always in and through historical personalities and events, theology must speak the language of God's personal and dramatic action effecting changes in the historical situation including the natural environment which is caught up into the historical situation. God comes, speaks, acts, works changes; unclean spirits are exorcised, the sick are healed, the dead are raised up; storms are stilled. Christ walks on the water, ascends into heaven, rules from the right hand of God.

Contemporary theologians sometime speak of this native language of Christianity as *Christian Mythology*. Bultmann has faced honestly the problems of Biblical mythology and contends that Christianity must be "demythologized" if it is to accept the criticism and purification of the modern sciences. In the controversy over "demythologizing" everything depends upon what is meant by "myth."

Certainly many aspects of Biblical mythology cannot be accepted literally by the modern man. Biblical astronomy, for instance, is completely replaced by post-Copernican astronomy. Again the Bible reports events, not with the primary purpose of historiographical accuracy but in order to show forth the revelation of God in, by and through those events. These historiographical aspects of the Bible sometimes may be corrected with a high degree of probability by the methods of the historian. Often, however, the data does not permit of a probable reconstruction of the event so that the historian's suggestion about what happened in a photographable way depends far more on his theological and philosophical presuppositions than upon his historical research. Even a sincere Christian New Testament historian

<sup>3</sup>I John 4: 9-11, 19.

<sup>4</sup>I John 3: 2.

may in honesty be able to say only what a particular narrative means to the author who has recorded it, and that, while the narrative expresses something which really happened, the exact nature of the event cannot be reconstructed with any degree of probability. As a Christian historian, he may be forced to be reverently agnostic about whether a cinematograph would capture the raising of Lazarus or not.

It is important in regard to this whole problem to distinguish between types of Biblical myths and between elements within the myths themselves. First, some myths objectify theological meanings as photographicable realities. Such a myth is that of Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden and their fall. To say that these myths objectify theological meanings as photographicable realities does not mean that they do not deal with realities which are photographicable. "Man" is photographicable in principle in all concrete men. Adam before the fall describes man in the image of God; Adam after the fall describes man as sinner. Perhaps we can call this type of myth "unhistorical".

Other Biblical myths, however, simply express the revelation which erupts from photographicable realities. Both the crucifiers and the disciples saw and heard a photographicable Jesus. That God sent his only-begotten Son into the world as Jesus of Nazareth describes the revelation which breaks forth from the historical Jesus. Perhaps "historical myth" is a good name for this type of myth.

The two types may overlap in one narrative as perhaps in the story of Jesus' transfiguration. One may surmise that Jesus, Peter, James and John would have registered on a film in a way that Moses and Elijah would not have. Decisions about the unhistorical elements in such a historical myth or whether the whole narrative is "unhistorical" is a risk which a historian may take in accordance with his own presuppositions.

Secondly, there are also elements within a historical myth which belong to the outlook of the time. Mental illness, for instance, is described in the Bible as demon-possession and the demons are detachable from their human habitations. The same phenomena may be described in the psychological terminology of the twentieth century without loss of religious meaning.

The indispensable element in both the historical and the unhistorical myth is the revealing action of God. No "demything" is possible on this level.

Myth in the Bible, therefore, is a story of divine action and human response. Everything else in the myth is subject in principle to correction by the historian. In brief, every relevant science may be used to understand and correct the reports of the historical events in and through which the revelation comes. But historical criticism using the sciences of psychology, sociology, source-criticism, form-criticism, archeology and all other relevant sciences, cannot either vindicate or threaten the validity of the revelation itself. For whatever the description of the visible events may be as corrected, those events or their equivalents manifested

## THE CHRISTIAN SCHOLAR

God in action, revealing himself and moving into the final revelatory and saving act in Christ. What God's revelation of himself gives us cannot be found out by any activity of man.

It is true also that what can be found out by man is not given us by the divine self-disclosure. Using "science" in its broadest meaning, every human science has its own autonomy as a science and theology perverts itself when it behaves in a tyrannical way toward human sciences.

Conversely, no human discovery can speak about God except by coming into the sphere of theology. Sciences pervert themselves when they speak theologically without awareness of entering the theological sphere.

Theology as theology is subject to the criticism of divine revelation but it can be reformed only from within itself. Insomuch however, as it deals with the subject matter of the human sciences, it is subject to their criticism. For instance, theology is not necessarily accompanied by good historiography.

Theology is the queen of the sciences because it gives all sciences their unity with each other and their ultimate meaning. It is the tyrant of none when it is true to itself. As Augustine wrote: "It very often happens that there is some question as to the earth or the sky, or the other elements of this world—respecting which one who is not a Christian has knowledge derived from most certain reasoning or observation, and it is very disgraceful and mischievous and of all things to be carefully avoided, that a Christian speaking of such matters as being according to the Christian Scriptures, should be heard by an unbeliever talking such nonsense that the unbeliever perceiving him to be as wide from the mark as east from west, can hardly restrain himself from laughing. . .

"The Gospels do not tell us that our Lord said, 'I will send you the Holy Ghost to teach you the course of the sun and the moon'; we should therefore endeavor to become Christians and not astronomers."<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>5</sup>De Genesi ad litteram, lib I. Cap XIX.

# Biblical Faith as Heilsgeschichte

The Meaning of Redemptive History in Human Existence

WILL HERBERG



THE UNIQUENESS — THE "SCANDAL" — of biblical faith is revealed in its radically historical character. Biblical faith is historical not merely because it has a history, or deals with historical events; there is nothing particularly novel in that. Biblical faith is historical in the much more profound sense that it is itself essentially a history. The message biblical faith proclaims, the judgments it pronounces, the salvation it promises, the teachings it communicates, are all defined historically and understood as historical realities, rather than as timeless structures of ideas or values. The historicity of biblical faith has long been a source of embarrassment to philosopher and mystic, yet it cannot be eliminated without virtually eliminating the faith itself. Dehistoricizing biblical faith is like paraphrasing poetry; something called an "idea content" remains, but everything that gave power and significance to the original is gone. Biblical faith is *faith enacted as history*, or it is nothing at all.

## I

How shall we understand this radically historical character of biblical faith? Is it merely a cultural trait of the "Hebraic mind", or does it reflect something deeper, something in the very grain of reality, particularly human reality?

There are, fundamentally, three ways in which man has attempted to understand himself, to establish his being, and to relate himself to what is ultimate. One of these, culturally perhaps the oldest, is the way of heathenism. Heathen man sees reality as *nature*; nature—divine since it is the locus of all ultimate sanctities, that beyond which there is nothing—is the context in which heathen man strives to understand himself and establish the meaning of his existence. The reality of his being is the "nature" in him, and rightness is to be achieved by engulfing himself in nature and its cyclical rhythms as an organic part of it. This is heathen man's way of realizing his humanness; heathen man feels wrong, and (if I may so put it) not truly himself, to the degree that he stands out of nature as an incommensurable element. Heathenism is thus at bottom total immanence, a primal unity of the divine, nature, and man.

Heathenism in this sense is obviously not something confined to primitive peoples remote in time and place. On the contrary, the heathen way of understanding man in his relation to ultimate reality seems to enter into the spirituality of men at all times and places, including our own. It emerges in the nature-pan-

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## THE CHRISTIAN SCHOLAR

theism of so many spiritually minded people of our time, as well as in the "hard-boiled" scientific naturalism that holds nature to be ultimate and sees man as nothing more than a biological organism adjusting to its environment.

Standing in a kind of polar opposition to the heathen outlook is the outlook characteristic of the tradition of Greek philosophy and Oriental mysticism. Here it is not nature which is held to be ultimate and really real—though it is often spoken of as in some sense divine—but the *timelessly eternal* behind nature. A sharp dualism of appearance and reality is basic to this view: appearance is material and empirical, multiple, mutable, temporal, engrossed in flux; reality is one, immutable, timeless, eternal, spiritual. This ontological dualism of appearance and reality, the temporal and the eternal, is mirrored in a body-soul dualism in terms of which human being is analyzed. The real self is the soul, and human self-realization becomes essentially the extrication of the self from nature and time (the body) and its elevation to the timeless realm of spirit. It is surely unnecessary to document the pervasiveness of this type of outlook, with its spiritualistic emphasis and its disparagement of time and history, among the religious people of our time. It is perhaps necessary to remind ourselves that however highminded and spiritual it may appear, this outlook, like the heathenism it replaces, is utterly alien to biblical faith, which understands human existence and ultimate reality in very different categories.

## II

Biblical faith defines a view of reality and human existence that marks a sharp break with the presuppositions of both heathenism and Greek-Oriental spirituality. In biblical faith, nature is real and time no illusion, since they are the creation of God: this is the biblical witness against the spiritualistic devaluation of the natural and the temporal. Yet though real, they are not self-subsistent or ultimate, since they look to God as their creator: here biblical faith takes its stand against heathen immanentism. In exactly the same way, biblical faith refuses to dissolve man into nature, as does heathenism, or into timeless spirit, as is the effort of so much of philosophy and mysticism. In biblical faith, man is understood as (to use a modern and perhaps inexact term) a psychophysical unity, really and truly part of nature, yet transcending it by virtue of his "spirit", his freedom, his self-awareness, his capacity to get beyond and outside of himself, by virtue of the "image of God" in which he is made.

This complex, multidimensional conception makes it possible, for the first time, to understand man as a genuinely personal and historical being. Heathen naturalism assimilates man's time (history) to nature's time, and feels the uniqueness of the self—insofar as that emerges—as a threat to the oneness with nature which is blessedness. Greek-Oriental eternalism necessarily devaluates history as pure temporality and finds no place for the self, with its uniqueness and multiplicity, in the realm of the really real. It is in biblical faith that the self and history come into their own, for in biblical faith it is man's "essential dignity" that he is a



self and "can have a history."<sup>1</sup> Indeed, the two are really one; in biblical faith, human history is intrinsically personal, and the self is an historical structure.

Here we come close to the heart of the matter. Biblical faith understands human existence and human destiny in irreducibly historical terms. If the question is asked what is the real reality of man, what is it the actualization of which constitutes the fullness of his being, the heathen (turned philosopher) would say nature; the Greek metaphysician and the Oriental mystic would say that which is timeless and eternal in him; but the biblical thinker would say his *history*. History is the very stuff out of which human being is made: human existence is potential or implicit history; history is explicit or actualized existence. And it is not very different on the corporate level. In attempting to explain to someone who really does not know what it means to be an American, it would be futile to try to contrive some conceptual definition of "Americanness." Would it not prove more appropriate to tell the story of America and rely upon that story to communicate the fullness of what it means to be an American? "The human person and man's society," Reinhold Niebuhr has profoundly observed, "are *by nature historical* . . . [and] the ultimate truth about life must be mediated historically"<sup>2</sup> (emphasis added).

This is the biblical understanding of man as an historical being. On the basis of this understanding, biblical faith insists that man can realize himself only in and through his life in history. It is in and through history that God calls to man; it is in and through history, human action in history, that man responds; and it is in and through history that God judges. Heathen man pursues his life in nature below the level of history; Greek-Oriental man aspires to escape from history into the realm of timeless eternity. Biblical man, on the contrary, seeing human existence as essentially historical, strives to redeem history, though realizing that it is not in his time or by his hand that the work can be completed.

It is in this context that the biblical notion of *Heilsgeschichte* (redemptive history, "sacred history") emerges and becomes intelligible. Lessing, in his inaugural address at Jena, protested that "particular facts of history cannot establish eternal truths," least of all the truths of religion; and Fichte reiterated that "the metaphysical only and not the historical can give blessedness." They were both repeating Celsus' outraged remonstrance against the "scandal of particularity," which is the "scandal" of history. But he who understands the reality of human being in biblical terms will find no difficulty in understanding that the ultimate truth about human life and destiny, about man's plight and man's hope alike, is truly and inexpugnably historical, and can be expressed in no other way. (Hence the Bible is composed so largely of stories, recitals, histories.) The structure of faith is an historical structure, because being, living, and acting are, in the biblical conviction, radically historical in character.

<sup>1</sup>Søren Kierkegaard *Either/or* (Princeton, 1946). Vol. II, p. 209.

<sup>2</sup>Reinhold Niebuhr, "Religion and Education," *Religious Education*, November-December 1953.

## III

Once we come to understand our existence in terms of history, and to analyze the human situation in historical terms, we begin to grasp what it means to think of faith as *Heilsgeschichte*. Examining the structure of our existence, we see that each of us has—or rather *is*—many partial histories, reflecting the many concerns and interests of life. We are Americans, members of a particular family and ethnic group, intimately associated with particular social institutions and movements. Each of these concerns, allegiances, and associations has its own special history through which it is expressed and made explicit. But most of these histories, we ourselves realize, are merely partial histories; they define only fragments of our being and do not tell us who we “really” are. Underlying and including the partial histories of life, there must be some “total” history, in some way fundamental and comprehensive, some really ultimate history. Such a history, the history which one affirms in a total and ultimate manner, is one’s *redemptive history* (*Heilsgeschichte*), for it is the history in terms of which the final meaning of life is established and the self redeemed from the powers of meaninglessness and non-being. This is the history that defines, and is defined by, one’s faith; it is, indeed, the history that *is* one’s faith. “To be a self,” H. Richard Niebuhr has said, “is to have a god; to have a god is to have a history.”<sup>3</sup> If we reverse this—“To have a history is to have a god; to have a god is to be a self”—we get a glimpse of the full significance of the relation of faith and history.

Whatever history I take to tell me who I “really” am may thus be taken to define my actual faith. If I take my American history to define not merely the American aspect of my life, but also the fullness and ultimacy of my being as a person, I make “Americanism” (the American Way of Life) my faith and the nation my god. A moment’s thought will show us how real this faith is in the lives of most of us today, and how clearly it is expressed as *Heilsgeschichte*. It has its symbols, liturgy, and ceremony, its holy days and cultic observances; it has its “sacred history” and its sense of messianic vocation.<sup>4</sup> Marxism, the great rival

<sup>3</sup>H. Richard Niebuhr, *The Meaning of Revelation* (Macmillan, 1941), p. 80.

<sup>4</sup>In this country, more than anywhere else in the world perhaps, the old Christian church year has been all but replaced in law and in fact by a round of holidays (Columbus Day, Washington’s Birthday, Independence Day, Memorial Day, Armistice [or Veterans] Day, etc., etc.) that mark great events in our national history; these are the days that Americans, insofar as they celebrate anything, celebrate as the “holy days” that really count. (Christmas and Easter are virtually all that remain of the old church calendar for the mass of Americans, and even these holidays have been largely voided of their religious content.) Perhaps even more revealing is the response of a group of outstanding Americans to the request that they rate the hundred most significant events in universal history. First place was given to Columbus’ discovery of America, while Christ, either his birth or crucifixion, came fourteenth, tied with the Wright brothers’ first plane flight (see the report in *Time*, May 24, 1954). This order of priority, so shocking in terms of Christian faith, becomes quite intelligible, even inevitable, once it is realized that the framework of faith in which it is made is the faith of “Americanism”. This faith is defined by American history taken as ultimate and redemptive; it is only natural that those who hold this faith and this redemptive history should see Columbus’ discovery of America (or alternatively, the American War of Independence) as the most important event in the annals of mankind. See also Will Herberg, *Protestant-Catholic-Jew: An Essay in American Religious Sociology* (Doubleday, 1955), chap. V.



## BIBLICAL FAITH AS *Heilsgeschichte*

of Americanism in the conflict of secular religions, is as thoroughly historical in structure, and even more obviously the reflection of the absolutization of a partial history. Marxism takes the partial history defined by there modern worker's being a proletarian as the ultimate and "total" history, and this history it proclaims as redemptive. From this standpoint, Marxism is, fundamentally, a secularized version—and therefore perversion—of biblical "sacred history", in which God is replaced by the Dialectic, the "chosen people" by the proletariat, the "faithful remnant" and even the Messiah by the Party, while the "beginning" and "end" of history, the "original rightness" lost and the "restored rightness" to come, are robbed of their transcendence and made points *within* the historical process. That Marxism is essentially a faith—an idolatrous faith—enacted as history, and therefore a *Heilsgeschichte*, is now almost a commonplace.

And so generally. Idolatrous faiths (particularly those emerging in the history-conscious West) are faiths defined by, and defining, partial histories made ultimate. They bear witness to gods that are idolatrous, in the sense that they are gods who are something of this world—some idea, institution, movement, power, or community—divinized and turned into absolutes. The idolatrous god thus has his idolatrous "sacred history"; very frequently, it is the idolatrous "sacred history" that is more vivid in men's minds than the god to whom it points.

Biblical faith, because it is faith in the living God, the God who is "beyond the gods" of the world, expresses itself in a redemptive history in which this God is central and the "holy people of God" the crucial historical community. And just as faith in the living God is the only alternative to idolatrous faiths, so, in the last analysis, the definition of life in terms of the "sacred history" of God's dealings with men given in biblical tradition is the only alternative to the idolatrous "totalization" of one or another of the partial histories which make up our lives. The ultimate existential decision is a choice between "sacred histories" as it is a choice between gods.

## IV

Biblical faith, understood as history, presents us with a grand and stirring drama of human existence and destiny. It is not my purpose to describe this cosmic drama, since that has been done and magnificently done in a number of recent works on biblical religion. In its essentials, it defines a three-phase pattern in which the present "wrong" and contradictory existence of man and society is seen as a falling away from the original "rightness" of God's creation, and as destined for restoration and rectification in the final fulfillment of the kingdom of God. Within this vast orbit, it traces the history of the "people of God," God's instrument for the redemption of mankind. All human history falls under its range and sweep, since its purpose is universal, though its center—the crucial revelatory, community-creating event (Exodus-Sinai in Judaism, Calvary-Easter in Christianity)—is particular. But no attempt is made to impose a final "philoso-

phy of history" upon the historical material, which is drawn from legend, saga, oral tradition, and written documents. Every understanding of history is felt to be partial and fragmentary; in the end, everything is swallowed up in the mystery of divine providence. Yet, however limited and uncertain our grasp of it may be, it is the "sacred history" that tells us who we are, where we stand, and what we hope for—that, in short, gives meaning to existence.

It has been repeatedly pointed out in recent years, and not by theologians alone, that this understanding of history tends to make for a creative realism that escapes utopianism on the one side and despair on the other. It is, in fact, the only real alternative to the many historical idolatries of our time, which are now seen to be distortions, often demonic distortions, of the historical faith and hope of the Bible.

Yet even with this understanding we have not penetrated to the heart of biblical faith as *Heilsgeschichte*. For we are still, as it were, on the outside looking in. Biblical "sacred history" possesses a double inwardness. It is, first of all, an interpretation through the eyes of faith of acts and events that, from another standpoint, might well be interpreted in an altogether different way: to Thucydides, the victorious Assyrian would hardly have appeared as the rod of God's anger against a wayward Israel. But it is inward also in another and perhaps deeper sense, in the sense that, as the history of God's redemptive work, it can become actually redemptive *for me*, redemptive existentially, only if I appropriate it in faith as *my personal history*, the history of my own life. "Faith in the New Testament sense," writes Oscar Cullmann, "is the way by which the past phase of redemptive history becomes effective for me . . . Faith in the New Testament sense means to be convinced that this entire happening takes place for me."<sup>5</sup> Remembrance and expectation are the two foci of existence in faith. "He who does not himself remember that God led him out of Egypt, he who does not himself await the Messiah," says Martin Buber, "is no longer a true Jew."<sup>6</sup> Religion is thus not the apprehension of eternal truths or loyalty to eternal values; it is rather the personal acceptance, through commitment and action, of what God has done, is doing, and will do for the redemption of mankind, in the first place of oneself.<sup>7</sup> From this angle, the act of faith is double: the existential affirmation of a history as one's redemptive history and the existential appropriation of this redemptive history as one's personal background history, and therefore in a real sense the foundation of one's personal existence. "In the history of Israel," to quote Buber once more, "we see the prehistory of our own life, each of us the prehistory of his own life."<sup>8</sup>

<sup>5</sup>Oscar Cullmann, *Christ and Time* (Westminster, 1949), p. 219.

<sup>6</sup>Martin Buber, "Der Preis", *Der Jude*, October 1917.

<sup>7</sup>In other words, redemption in the biblical sense is history, though history is not, as the Marxists or liberal utopians think, redemptive.

<sup>8</sup>Martin Buber, "Hasidism in Religion", *Hasidism* (Philosophical Library, 1948), p. 199. This is true for both Jew and Christian, though the Christian, of course, extends the "old Israel" into the "new Israel" of the Church.

## BIBLICAL FAITH AS *Heilsgeschichte*

But this means that redemptive history is not merely a recital that we hear and understand. It is also a demand upon us, for out of it comes the voice of God. Faith is responding to the call of God that comes to us from out of the midst of redemptive history. It is (to borrow from Kierkegaard) as though we sat witnessing some tremendous epic drama being performed on a vast stage, when suddenly the chief character of the drama, who is also its director, steps forward to the front of the stage, fixes his eye upon us, points his finger at us, and calls out: "You, you're wanted. Come up here. Take your part!" This is the call of faith coming from out of "sacred history", the call to cease to be a spectator and come forward to be an actor in the great drama of redemption. We are none of us comfortable with this call; we much prefer the anonymity and irresponsibility of being spectators, and we resent the demand that we come forward, assume responsibility, and become actors. But precisely this is the demand of biblical faith as redemptive history. Unless we receive this call and respond to it, the redemptive history that we apprehend is not redemptive. It does not really tell us who we are, where we stand, and what we may hope for; it does not really give meaning to existence. The history which redeems is a history in which one is both object and subject, both spectator and actor; but paradoxically, it is a history in which one is not object unless he is subject, one is not spectator unless he is actor, for unless one is really actor and subject, the "sacred history" ceases to be personal history and loses all religious significance. Redemptive history, to be truly redemptive, must be existential, appropriated in inwardness in personal existence as a demand and a responsibility. This is the meaning of biblical faith as *Heilsgeschichte*.

# Mystical vs. Biblical Symbolism

E. LA B. CHERBONNIER



SYMBOL IS ANYTHING WHICH represents something else. Discussion of symbolism falls into confusion, however, unless one clearly distinguishes between the *efficacy* of a symbol and its *truth*. While its efficacy is relative to the individual who apprehends the symbol, its truth is quite independent of him. For example, King William the First may be truly symbolized by the phrase, "the Conqueror," but unless one knows a minimum of English, the symbol is ineffective. Conversely, for some people "Wall Street" may effectively symbolize rapacious profiteering, quite apart from the actual truth of the matter.

Mathematicians and logicians are primarily concerned with the *truth* of a symbol, with its capacity adequately to represent that which it symbolizes. Poets and artists, on the contrary, are primarily concerned with the *efficacy* of a symbol, with its power to influence and captivate. An artistic symbol achieves its effect not primarily by the purely logical connection of ideas, but by the power of suggestion. Instead of appealing principally to the head, it strikes responsive chords at all levels of experience. It revives and intensifies the inner relations between the mental events of one's past, and may even create new associations for the future.

A specifically *religious* symbol is any word or object in space and time which stands in a special relation to ultimate reality. It combines the principal function of both artistic and logical symbols. Like the former, it appeals to the *whole* man, and not just his reason. Like the latter, it stands or falls on its claim to communicate truth; that is, it must adequately represent ultimate reality. From this an important conclusion follows. A religious symbol does not *establish* anything about the nature of reality, but it merely points to what is believed *on other grounds* to be "really real" (even though these other grounds are not made explicit).

The specific nature of any religious symbol will therefore depend in part upon the "reality" it purports to symbolize. Its function will vary with the particular metaphysical context which it serves. There are as many different kinds of religious symbol, therefore, as there are kinds of religion. It would sow confusion to discuss "religious symbolism" *per se*, without first specifying the metaphysical context within which one speaks. For example, the following two quotations, taken from completely different metaphysico-religious contexts, illustrate kinds of religious symbolism which are altogether incommensurate with each other:

Once during the life of Gautama the Buddha a disciple approached him with a gift of a golden flower and asked him to preach the secret of the doctrine. Gautama took the flower, held it aloft and looked at it in silence, indicating that the secret lay not in words but in the profound contemplation of the flower itself.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Life magazine, article on Buddhism, March 7, 1955.

## MYSTICAL VS. BIBLICAL SYMBOLISM

Thus saith the Lord: Go and get a potter's earthen bottle. . . . Then shalt thou break the bottle in the sight of the men that go with thee, and shalt say unto them, Thus saith the Lord of hosts, Even so will I break this people and this city, as one breaketh a potter's vessel, that cannot be made whole again. (Jeremiah 19: 1, 10, 11).

The present article will examine the very different roles played by religious symbols in these two distinct metaphysico-religious systems and will inquire which of the two is the more defensible.

### I. THE ROLE OF SYMBOLS IN MYSTICAL RELIGION THE MYSTICAL METAPHYSIC

The first of these two alternative systems is, in the technical sense, mysticism. Though in unadulterated form it is more characteristic of the Orient, variations of it occur, if sometimes in disguise, in the Western world as well. An excellent and succinct statement of it by a contemporary protagonist is W. T. Stace's book, *Time and Eternity*.<sup>2</sup> The metaphysical assumptions underlying this religion comprise what Aldous Huxley has called the "perennial philosophy": Reality is an undifferentiated unity. The everyday world, since it is a multiplicity, is therefore not really real, but at best a fragmented distortion of true Being. Though illusory, it nevertheless imprisons all who take it seriously. The goal of human living is to dissolve all connection with the realm of space and time, including even consciousness itself. For since consciousness implies a distinction between knowing subject and known object, it belongs to the defective world of plurality.

#### THE NATURE AND FUNCTION OF MYSTICAL SYMBOLS

The attainment of this goal is at least partially accomplished through the medium of religious symbols. Since the everyday world, no matter how deeply "infected with finitude," must have derived ultimately from the one underlying reality, any material object may upon occasion become a religious symbol; that is, it may become the bearer of its own "divine ground," a window through which the individual apprehends the infinite. Hence a modern exponent of this view can say, "Symbolic does not mean unreal. It means more real than anything in time and space."<sup>3</sup> In the so-called "ecstatic moment," the symbol evokes a state in which the cleavage between knower and known is overcome, consciousness is suspended, and the self in any recognizable sense is left behind. As W. T. Stace describes it:

Thus in the mystic moment subject and object, God and the world, the divine order and the natural order, have coalesced, become one in the divisionless, relationless, ultimate unity of things.<sup>4</sup>

A consequence of the theory is that every symbolic expression is necessarily ambiguous. It must simultaneously negate what it affirms. In so far as it derives from ultimate reality, the symbol is able to reflect some truth. But in so far as it is

<sup>2</sup>See W. T. Stace, *Time and Eternity* (Princeton University Press, 1952).

<sup>3</sup>Paul Tillich, "Religion and Its Intellectual Critics," *Christianity and Crisis*, Volume XV, Number 3, March 7, 1955, page 21.

<sup>4</sup>W. T. Stace, *op. cit.*, page 40f.

also disrupted from its "divine ground," it inevitably distorts it:

The segment of finite reality which becomes the vehicle of a concrete assertion about God is affirmed and negated at the same time. It becomes a symbol, for a symbolic expression is one whose proper meaning is negated by that to which it points. And yet it is affirmed by it.<sup>5</sup>

It follows that to translate symbolic expressions into literal propositions is inherently impossible. Since the words of everyday speech are the product of the "subject-object structure" of the spatio-temporal world, they are inadequate to the "divine ground," and even do violence to it. Every proposition about "ultimate reality" therefore negates itself. The only way to avoid these paradoxes is to be silent. The mystics therefore regularly insist that silence does far more justice to truth than does speech. In fact, the word "mystic" itself is derived from the Greek word *muein*, "to keep silent." Hence the Buddha replies to his disciple by silently contemplating the golden flower.

#### CRITIQUE

The chief difficulty with the mystical theory of symbols is that in practice it negates itself. One cannot even state it without at the same time violating it. To put it into words is to imply that it is truer than alternative theories. But this is precisely what the theory itself forbids! It prohibits an unambiguous distinction between true and false where religion is concerned.

The moment the philosopher or theologian tries to speak or think coherently, he cannot help implying that some statements and symbols are truer than others. But this would imply some definite, unambiguous standard by which their truth could be measured; that is, religious symbols would then be subordinated to some non-symbolic criterion. And this is precisely what the theory itself precludes. This dilemma has been forcefully pointed out by Rabbi Abraham Heschel. Speaking of the mystic's use of symbols, he says:

Their (symbols') validity will, furthermore, depend upon our being in possession of criteria by means of which we could decide which symbols represent and which misrepresent the object we are interested in; which to accept and which to reject. Yet in order to prove the validity of symbols in general and in order to judge the adequacy of particular symbols, we must be in possession of a knowledge of the symbolized object that is independent of all symbols. To justify and to judge symbols we are in need of non-symbolic knowledge . . . Does not this prove that symbols are secondary to religious knowledge?<sup>6</sup>

Rabbi Heschel's point can be corroborated by an examination of any mystical treatise. In every case, the author, while explicitly denying that symbols may be subordinated to a non-symbolic criterion, appeals in the end to just such a standard. When W. T. Stace, for example, declares that "all propositions about the divine ground are false,"<sup>7</sup> he serves notice on the reader that his book does not say any-

<sup>5</sup>Paul Tillich, *Systematic Theology* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1951), Volume I, page 239.

<sup>6</sup>Abraham J. Heschel, "Symbolism and Jewish Faith", in F. Ernest Johnson, ed., *Religious Symbolism* (New York: The Institute for Religious and Social Studies, 1955), page 65.

<sup>7</sup>W. T. Stace, *op. cit.*, page 92.



## MYSTICAL VS. BIBLICAL SYMBOLISM

thing about God. In order to avoid this implication, he is obliged to maintain that some symbols are more false than others. In order to evaluate them, he appeals to a perfectly clear and unambiguous standard: consciousness. The higher an object is in the scale of consciousness, the more adequately it can symbolize "true reality." This subordination of symbolic knowledge to a non-symbolic criterion is quite possibly a superior theological method, but it contradicts the author's mystical theory. Other examples could be multiplied by as many times as there are written statements of mystical theory. A non-symbolic criterion is regularly imported into the system, sometimes explicitly, sometimes not. This standard itself will vary. It may be natural theology of a Thomistic kind,<sup>8</sup> or, in a more Platonic vein, it may be "that which is logically prior or most universal."<sup>9</sup> Whether these or other possible criteria are defensible is beyond the present purpose to inquire. The point is that any such non-symbolic criterion is incompatible with the mystical theory of symbolism which their sponsors espouse.

It is as though God himself had so ordered human reasoning that no incorrect metaphysical theory could be consistently elaborated. Stace seems to sense this when he admits that "contradictions necessarily break out in all philosophies whose source and inspiration is mysticism, and . . . all attempts to resolve these contradictions necessarily fail."<sup>10</sup>

This explicit defiance of the ordinary canons of truth puts the exponent of the theory squarely on the horns of a dilemma, between which he can generally be discovered shuttling back and forth. On the one hand, he may forfeit the question of truth altogether. Like the artist, he may become so preoccupied with the purely emotive power of his symbols that he forgets to ask whether they convey truth. Or, on the other hand, he may take the other horn of his dilemma, and claim for his symbols a "higher" kind of truth. This cognitive claim is made by a contemporary philosopher of art, Philip Wheelwright, in his recent book, *The Burning Fountain*:

A poem affects a mature reader as it does partly because it seems to him, notwithstanding its fantasies and pseudo-statements, to be offering a kind of genuine insight and thereby to be revealing, however obscurely and elusively, a kind of truth.<sup>11</sup>

The knowledge which symbolic language mediates is incommensurable with that of the everyday world, not directly expressible in ordinary language, and not accessible except through artistic and poetic symbols. According to a major con-

<sup>8</sup>Austin Farrer, *The Glass of Vision* (Westminster: Dacre Press, 1948), page 54: "Natural theology, then, provides a canon of interpretation which stands outside the particular matter of revealed truth."

<sup>9</sup>See, for example, Paul Tillich, "Reply to Interpretation and Criticism," in C. W. Kegley and R. W. Bretall, eds., *The Theology of Paul Tillich* (New York: Macmillan, 1952), page 339, where the word "Being" is defended as the non-symbolic word for God on the ground that it "precedes in logical dignity" all other designations. See also the same author, *Love, Power, and Justice* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1954), page 20.

<sup>10</sup>W. T. Stace, *op. cit.*, page 157.

<sup>11</sup>Philip Wheelwright, *The Burning Fountain* (Bloomington: University of Indiana Press, 1954), page 45f.

tributor to the study of religious symbolism:

The symbol opens up a level of meaning which otherwise is closed. It opens up a stratum of reality, of meaning and being which otherwise we could not reach. . . . (A landscape painting) is a picture in which everything is symbolic in the sense that it points to a reality and a meaning . . . which the painter in his creative encounter reveals to us. Now we can see it; now we can be in it. . . . We never would see it if art did not reveal it to us.<sup>12</sup>

A theory which claims immunity to the ordinary canons of verification can easily slip into esotericism. Many mystics appeal in the last analysis to intuition, or to "meta-logic,"<sup>13</sup> or to an aristocracy of the "more religiously sensitive and the more intellectually acute," as in the following statement:

Nor is "the occurrence itself" experientially the same for an observer with *artistically heightened sensibilities* as for a *dolt* . . . For he who is *spiritually awake* and he who is *spiritually asleep*, he who is *whole* and he who is *defective*, may apperceive reality in . . . divergent ways.<sup>14</sup>

These lines reveal the authoritarian tendency of all esotericism. Anyone who disagrees is automatically labelled a dolt, spiritually asleep, and defective.

The mystical metaphysic thus appears to contain an inner logic which drives its advocates to concentrate upon the efficacy of a symbol at the expense of its truth, to fall into inconsistencies, and, consequently, as a measure of desperation, to become esoteric and even dogmatic. The onus is on the mystic to show the difference between his symbols and an insoluble cryptogram.

## II. SYMBOLISM IN THE METAPHYSIC OF THE BIBLE

### THE METAPHYSICAL CONTEXT

The second kind of religious symbolism to be discussed occurs *par excellence* in the Bible. Symbols like Jeremiah's flask occur in a metaphysical context which differs radically from that of the mystic, and apart from which they cannot be understood. For the mystic, this earthly life is but a counterfeit of true reality. In "biblical philosophy," on the contrary, the events of personal and social history are themselves "metaphysical." They are of decisive ultimate significance. As H. Wheeler Robinson puts it:

. . . Hebrew philosophy (if the term may be allowed) ascribed metaphysical significance to events in the external world. . . . This implies that man's life is not a shadow-drama, an illusion in the minds of the actors, or a mode of the divine consciousness leaving no room for any effective agency of man. On the contrary, man's deeds have a real significance, and man's history is, under God's direction, the record of real achievements. On such a view of history the whole conception of the Biblical revelation rests. . . .<sup>15</sup>

The "biblical philosophy" does not require a great deal of elaboration. Not only is it far less complicated than the elaborate constructs of theosophy, but it is a world-

<sup>12</sup>Paul Tillich, "Theology and Symbolism," in F. Ernest Johnson, *op. cit.*, page 109.

<sup>13</sup>See, for example, W. T. Stace, *op. cit.*, pages 105, 109; also, Philip Wheelwright, *op. cit.*, pages 15, 51, 59, 63.

<sup>14</sup>Philip Wheelwright, *op. cit.*, pages 301f.

<sup>15</sup>H. Wheeler Robinson, "Prophetic Symbolism," in *Old Testament Essays* (London: Charles Griffin & Co., Ltd., 1927), pages 11, 17.

## MYSTICAL VS. BIBLICAL SYMBOLISM

view which comes naturally to men. Children come into the world believing in the reality and importance of spatio-temporal events. When they learn that there is no Santa Claus, they are not reassured to be told that he is a myth. They know very well that a mythical Santa is no Santa Claus at all. It requires a concentrated program of indoctrination to knock this native common sense out of their heads.

At one significant point this "naive realism" differs from realistic or empirical philosophies of the technical sort. It takes for granted what the world's wise men have so often denied, the fact of human freedom. If the events of human history are at all meaningful, they must be performed by *free* agents. Conversely, if there is no such thing as the freedom to act voluntarily and responsibly in accordance with chosen purposes, then life is indeed a shadow play, and the entire biblical metaphysic a delusion. In addition to the reality and metaphysical importance of this world, then, the biblical metaphysic also assumes the freedom of God and man. This explains why the Bible always speaks of God in such very human terms. This is the only way to acknowledge his freedom, since the only other free agent we know is man himself. Judged by the mystic's criterion of "Being-itself," this "anthropomorphic" God is but a low order of symbol, "a symbol for the God beyond the God of theism."<sup>16</sup> For the biblical metaphysic, on the contrary, "Being-Itself" is not even a low order of symbol, but a misnomer. The truest thing that can be said about God is that he is *Someone*.

### BIBLICAL SYMBOLS

At one point, the biblical use of symbols does correspond to the mystical. For both, the symbol functions as a special bearer of metaphysical reality. But this resemblance is purely formal. When it comes to content, to the *nature* of reality, the two systems are irreconcilably different. The one negates the spatio-temporal world, the other accords it decisive metaphysical status. The biblical metaphysic makes no appeal to a transcendent realm of being disjunctive with the everyday world, but rather regards the world as correlative with (though wholly dependent upon) its Creator. It consequently has no room for symbols in the mystical sense. On the contrary, biblical symbols are historical acts which stand for other historical acts of the past or future. Their truth as well as their efficacy depends upon the metaphysical importance which the Bible attaches to history.

History can only be real and significant if it has an over-all unity. Certainly it carries no such unity immanently within itself. Hence for the mystic it continually dissolves into an unconnected series of timeless moments in which the individual may be released from the trammels of time and brought into a "vertical" relation with the "divine." The task of biblical metaphysics is to prevent this disintegration of history by explaining how its temporal components are coherent.

<sup>16</sup>Paul Tillich, "Theology and Symbolism," *op. cit.*, page 114. See also the same author's *The Courage to Be* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1952), pages 186-190.

The only way in which a temporal sequence involving free agents may be integrated into a unity is through constancy of *purpose*. The time span of a tennis match, for example, is held in unity by the common purpose of the players. When a longer interval is involved, however, the continuity of purpose may not be immediately evident. A way must be found to realize it, to make it present. And this is precisely the role which symbols and solemn ritual play in the context of the biblical metaphysic. Since this world view is shared by the man in the street, an illustration can be used which is not always specifically religious: the symbol of the wedding ring. If bride and groom are to forge a unity of their lives for as long as they both shall live, they must have a common purpose. The ring ceremony affirms and makes concrete their joint intention to keep faith with each other in the creation of a new spiritual reality. Moreover, the symbol has an efficacy beyond the simple provision of palpable evidence of a unifying purpose. It can even help to *establish* that purpose by requiring of the participants an act of mutual allegiance. The symbol thus both represents and evokes the continuity of purpose which alone can give unity to a human time span.

When the period of time is measured in centuries, rather than the individual's threescore years and ten, it gets its unity from nations and cultures. By providing a relatively permanent center of allegiance, they can impart a unity to whole epochs. This overarching continuity of allegiance is likewise attested by symbolic acts and objects, such as the flag, national anthem, and oath of allegiance. The wealth of ritual which surrounds the British Parliament is an outstanding example.

When one considers neither the lifetime of the individual nor that of the nation, but all of human history, then no such-over-all unity of purpose is immediately apparent. Nations and cultures rise and fall, and take their ephemeral meanings with them. In fact, according to the biblical philosophy of history, the reason for the fall of a nation is precisely its failure to align its own provisional purpose with the one and only purpose which can and does give unity to all of history, the will of its Creator. The function of the specifically religious symbol in the Bible is therefore analogous to that of the wedding ring and of Parliamentary ritual. It attests the continuity of history, *not* by transcending time, but by making vivid, concrete, and actual God's unifying purpose *within* time. It impresses upon men with dramatic impact the reality of God's action in the past, and in some measure is instrumental in actualizing his purpose for the future.

This two-fold-function of religious symbols is noted by H. Wheeler Robinson in his analysis of Isaiah's going barefoot and naked as a sign of the coming captivity of Egypt; Jeremiah's wearing the yoke to symbolize Judah's impending subjection to Babylon; his breaking the earthen flask to represent the destruction of Jerusalem; and Ezekiel's lying on his side for forty days to represent the duration of Judah's captivity. He says:

## MYSTICAL VS. BIBLICAL SYMBOLISM

The prophet's act did not simply reveal something already achieved, but hidden; it helped to achieve something, it made a difference. . . . It was not magic, for it was not coercive of Yahweh; it was religion, the religious act of one whose consciousness was made the vehicle of the divine will. . . . The prophets are protagonists; their human consciousness becomes the effective symbol of the divine consciousness, as their human acts become the effective symbols of the divine acts. . . . (Biblical religion) is more than a revelation; its revelation is a realization, both of God and man.<sup>17</sup>

### CORRELATION OF WORD AND DEED

One of the points at which prophetic symbols differ most strikingly from the mystic's is their strict correlation with the spoken word.<sup>18</sup> Whereas the mystic abandons words as incommensurate with the "divine," prophetic symbols are meaningless without their verbal concomitant. For purpose can never adequately be made known apart from speech. An act by itself is capable of many different interpretations until the *intention* of the agent is spoken. As Frederick Schumacher has expressed it, "To say that word and event go together and that the word of Yahweh is event is to say that events are not accidental or the result of fate, but that they are purposive and meaningful."<sup>19</sup>

This is the reason why neither historian nor philosopher can discover the unity of history by an examination of "the facts" alone. Their various and ingenious speculations on the meaning of history, though not without some plausibility, all succumb in the end to recalcitrant facts which do not fit the theory. The events of history can only be unified when related to the purpose of God.

The unifying purpose of God can never be derived from the events alone, but can only be known when declared by God himself. Once this is established, one is in a position to appreciate the overwhelming import of the following passage from Isaiah:

I am God, and there is none like me, *declaring* the end from the beginning, and from ancient times things that are not yet *done*, saying: My counsel shall stand, and I will *do* all my purpose. . . . I have *spoken*, I will also *bring it to pass*. I have *purposed*, I will also *do* it (Isaiah 46:9-11).

This indissoluble connection with the spoken word preserves for biblical symbolism what is destroyed by the mystical: the validity of human reason. Whereas the mystic ultimately spurns reason as part of the subject-object structure of the everyday world, the prophetic symbol *requires* an intelligible interpretation. The following words of St. Paul, originally directed to a somewhat similar question, beautifully express the indispensability of human reason to the biblical metaphysic:

So also ye, unless ye utter by the tongue speech easy to be understood, how shall it be known what is spoken? . . . I had rather speak five words with my understanding, that I might instruct others also, than ten thousand words in a tongue. (I Corinthians 14:9, 19).

<sup>17</sup>H. Wheeler Robinson, *op. cit.*, pages 15, 17, 6.

<sup>18</sup>*Ibid.*, page 6.

<sup>19</sup>Frederick T. Schumacher, "The Word of God as Event," *Journal of Bible and Religion*, Volume XX, Number 4, October, 1952, page 253.



## THE CHRISTIAN SCHOLAR

If the symbolic deed cannot be separated from the interpretative word, the converse is equally true. The content of the symbol cannot be translated without remainder into a verbal or rational formula. There will always be a non-verbal residue. Prophetic symbolism thus fits perfectly with biblical "anthropology." It requires intelligibility without ever supposing that reason or words can take the place of purposive action.<sup>20</sup>

A word may be added about the distinction between "literal" and "symbolic" within the biblical framework. Whereas for the mystic this distinction represents a cleavage between two incompatible realms of being, for the Bible literal and symbolic acts both belong to the realm of history. Though the symbolic act refers to another event of the past or future, at the time of its actual accomplishment the symbolized event was (or will be) quite *literal*. The distinguishing characteristic of a biblical symbol is simply that it "makes present" a literal act of the past or future. Whereas for the mystic a story or statement may be literally false but symbolically true, for the Bible this is impossible. The truth of its symbols is wholly dependent upon the factuality of the events which they symbolize.

### SYMBOLIC OBJECTS

If symbols are the bearer of reality, and if, as the Bible maintains, nothing is more real than free agents (God primarily, and man as his creation), then biblical symbols refer inevitably to purposive action. This does not mean, however, that there is no room in Christianity for symbolic *objects*, like the cross. Such objects differ from symbolic actions in that they refer primarily to the historic past. The cross gets its meaning from what has been done, once and for all, by man and God.

This function of symbolic objects within the biblical context has been developed by several recent authors, including Gregory Dix, Claude Tresmontant, and G. Ernest Wright. John W. Bowman uses the example of a flower on a bush, which (unlike Buddha's flower) has no special significance in itself, but remains a stage prop in the drama of history. When plucked and presented to a lady, however, it enters into history, and acquires significance through its relation to the purposive activity of the persons involved.<sup>21</sup>

This historical reference of the symbolic object suffices to distinguish it from the mystic's. In both cases the symbolic object points beyond itself. For the mystic, however, it points beyond the spatio-temporal world altogether to a reality which cannot be uttered. Within the biblical context, on the contrary, its meaning is not self-evident, but always depends upon its reference, whether spoken or understood, to *res gestae*, deed done.

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<sup>20</sup>For the development of some of these conceptions the writer is indebted to unpublished manuscripts of Messrs. Frank Dilley, Robert Horn, and Robert Newton.

<sup>21</sup>See John W. Bowman, *Prophetic Realism and the Gospel* (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1955), pages 102f.



## MYSTICAL VS. BIBLICAL SYMBOLISM

Furthermore, for the mystic any object, without distinction, can become the vehicle of the divine. Hence he grants no finality to religious symbols, but regards them all as subject to a "natural history" in which they come into existence and pass away.<sup>22</sup> For the Bible, however, this is emphatically not the case. The cross stands for concrete acts of man and God which stand indelibly on the record. If the Church were to forsake the cross for some other symbol, it would thereby have transferred its allegiance to another "god."

### MYTH

The subject of myth, and particularly the current discussion about "demythologizing" the New Testament, cannot be dissociated from an implicit metaphysical context. The meaning of the term "myth," like that of "symbol," will vary as one passes from the mystical to the biblical frame of reference. In fact, for both systems, a myth is a special instance of symbolism.

For the mystic, since all concern with mundane, spatio-temporal events is beneath the dignity of his religion, no ultimate truth can be conveyed in temporal terms. Most people, however, lacking the mystic's insight into a trans-temporal realm, are obliged to think in terms of pictures and stories. As an accommodation to their limitations, he grants that myths are better than nothing. But since they are cast in narrative form, myths are the lowest kind of symbol. Under no condition may their temporal structure be taken literally; that is, under no condition may their religious significance be tied to historical fact. For the more localized a given event in space and time, the more deeply rooted in history, the less divine truth it can disclose.

An example of this tendency to detemporalize all narrative whatsoever, without even raising the question of its historical significance, is the following interpretation of Christian narrative by D. T. Suzuki:

In this respect Christianity is more symbolic than Buddhism. The story of Creation, the Fall from the Garden of Eden, God's sending Christ to compensate for the ancestral sins, his crucifixion, and resurrection—they are all symbols. To be more explicit, creation is the awakening of consciousness, or the "awakening of a thought"; the Fall is consciousness going astray from the original path; God's idea of sending his own son among men is the desire of the will to see itself through its own offspring, consciousness; crucifixion is transcending the dualism of acting and knowing, which comes from the awakening of the intellect; and finally Resurrection means the will's triumph over the intellect; in other words, the will seeing itself in and through consciousness. . . . Buddhism is thus free from the historical symbolism of Christianity; transcending the category of time, Buddhism attempts to achieve salvation in one act of the will; for returning effaces all the traces of time.<sup>23</sup>

The Bible takes exactly the opposite view. As an English philosopher has said, "For myths . . . the Christian religion can find no place at all . . . The very quin-

<sup>22</sup>See, for example, Paul Tillich, *Systematic Theology*, *op. cit.*, Volume I, page 240, and "Theology and Symbolism," *op. cit.*, page 111.

<sup>23</sup>D. T. Suzuki, *Essays in Zen Buddhism*, First Series (London: Luzac and Co., 1927), pages 141f.

tenessence of Christianity is the substitution of history for myth."<sup>24</sup> Within the biblical metaphysic, God himself is a protagonist in the drama of history, a real-life drama in which men's salvation is won and lost, here and now. To label "mythical" or "symbolic" Christianity's central affirmations about the acts of God in space and time is to mistake it for another religion.

The proposal to "demythologize" the New Testament frequently betrays the mystical, rather than the biblical metaphysic. W. G. Kümmel points out that Rudolf Bultmann, for example, uses the word "mythological" to refer to anything temporal.<sup>25</sup> His intention is to remove an imagined "essence" of Christianity from beyond the reach of historical criticism, so that a man's faith need not depend upon an "historical contingency." Far from doing Christianity a service, however, such "demythologizing" capitulates to mysticism without firing a shot. For biblical religion stands or falls upon the most radically contingent events, the voluntary acts of God in all their underivable givenness.

There are, however, two events which differ from those of the rest of history, namely, its beginning and its final consummation. Like other biblical symbols, the accounts of creation and of the last things refer to past and future acts of God, and are therefore quite properly (and literally) cast in narrative form. In order to distinguish these two terminal events from those which intervene between them, one might, for lack of a less misleading term, call them "myths," provided always that the term is understood in its biblical, rather than its mystical, sense. A biblical myth is an extrapolation into past or future based upon what God has already done within recorded history. It describes how the world *must* have begun, and what the outcome of history will have to be, consistently with God's experienced character and purpose.

Since the great events of the beginning and the end are too vast and imagination-defying for a prophet to enact symbolically, he resorts instead to awesome and even fantastic imagery. This is the only respect in which these two "myths" differ from other biblical symbols. To "demythologize" them—that is, to transpose them into timeless categories—before the underlying metaphysical issue has been settled, is not merely to prejudge the case, but radically to depart from the religious and metaphysical intent of their authors. As Oscar Cullmann has said:

The difference between primal and eschatological history from actual historical occurrence may and indeed should be taken into account. But its character as a development in time . . . must not be destroyed. Where the primal and eschatological history is raised to another, timeless plane, we then have to do with a transformation of the Primitive Christian faith.<sup>26</sup>

<sup>24</sup>W. H. V. Reade, *The Christian Challenge to Philosophy* (London: S. P. C. K., 1951), page 57f. I owe the reference to Mr. Frank Wekerle.

<sup>25</sup>W. G. Kümmel, "Mythische Rede und Heilsgeschehen", *Coniectanea Neotestamentica*, Volume XI, especially pages 118-120. The writer owes the reference to Professor Howard Kee.

<sup>26</sup>Oscar Cullmann, *Christ and Time*, Floyd V. Filson, trans. (London: S. C. M. Press, Ltd., 1951), page 106.

## MYSTICAL VS. BIBLICAL SYMBOLISM

### CONCLUSION

The present discussion has indicated certain points at which the biblical metaphysic holds an advantage over the mystical. While both are concerned with the symbol's *efficacy*, the latter finally abandons the question of *truth*, claiming for itself a privileged sanctuary immune to criticism and beyond the canons of true-or-false. Disparaging human reason as incompatible with the "divine" realm, where "all is one," it resorts instead to insistence, ambiguity, and cryptic utterance. Biblical symbols, on the contrary, by their inseparable connection with literal words spoken and deeds done, preserve both the rational element, without which all discourse degenerates into billingsgate, and the factual element, without which theology becomes a fairy tale.

Before the issue can be finally settled, of course, this preliminary analysis would have to be followed up by a full-scale metaphysical inquiry. Jew and Christian can, however, await with confidence the outcome of such an inquiry. For if their God is indeed the Lord of all creation, he is the Lord of metaphysics too. The prophet therefore serves notice to the philosopher that any metaphysic whose definition of the real is incompatible with the biblical God may be expected to fall into contradictions. Meanwhile, to distinguish clearly between the two kinds of symbolism may help both to clarify the crucial issue and to cast doubt upon the wisdom of importing mystical symbols into Christian theology.

If and when the superiority of the biblical metaphysic is established, a legitimate question might arise concerning the role of the arts. In view of the close affinity between the mystical world-view and a good deal of aesthetic theory, what would be the role of art in a world informed by the biblical metaphysic? For one thing, poet and artist could no longer be regarded as seers, mediators of a transcendent truth whose word must be accepted on authority. It is hard to see how such a consequence could be anything but healthy.

Beyond that, the arts would continue to function as they do already; that is, as especially powerful means of expression, in view of their appeal to the *whole* man, rather than just his intellect. Men informed by the biblical outlook would probably be less prone to mistake this means for an end; that is, to become so enamored of the powerful *way in which* the artist expresses himself as to neglect what it is that he is saying, and thereby to fall the unwitting victims of a dubious metaphysic. Such indiscriminating devotion to "art for art's sake" only provokes an equally uncritical reaction in the form of censorship and suppression.

Finally, there would be less temptation within a biblical framework to accept on faith the claim that artistic symbols are able of themselves to accomplish men's salvation, a claim made explicitly by the following lines:

So far as we yield . . . assent joyfully and gain insight in so doing, there is a real and valid sense in which we can speak of "poetic truth." . . . The ground-base of poetic truth is the truth . . . of man's possible redemption through the fullest imaginative response.<sup>27</sup>

<sup>27</sup>Philip Wheelwright, *op. cit.*, page 302.

## THE CHRISTIAN SCHOLAR

The biblical reply to such extravagant claims on behalf of mystical and aesthetic symbols has been eloquently made by Rabbi Heschel:

"You do not believe," said Coleridge, "you only believe that you believe. It is the final scene in all kinds of worship and symbolism."

Let us never forget: *If God is a symbol, He is a fiction.* But if *God is real*, then He is able to express his will unambiguously.

Harsû and bitter are the problems which religion comes to solve: ignorance, evil, malice, power, agony, and despair. Our problem is: Do we believe what we confess? Do we mean what we say?

We do not suffer symbolically; we suffer literally, truly, deeply; symbolic remedies are quackery. The will of God is either real or a delusion.<sup>28</sup>

<sup>28</sup>Abraham J. Heschel, *op. cit.*, pages 78f.

# Creation

WALTER HARRELSON



PECULATION ABOUT THE BEGINNINGS of things appears to be a characteristic feature of human thought. Such speculation has taken many forms, in the ancient world as well as today. In a universe marked by constant change, man is forced, one might almost say, to inquire about the beginning of this process, and to seek some clue to its meaning. The inquiry is often framed in terms of the relation between time and eternity, between process and reality, between the natural and the supernatural realms. Sometimes attention is centered on the discovery of the primary material of which all others are derivative. In more recent times the question has been set aside by some as of no real meaningfulness. It proves, however, very difficult to ignore.

For the ancient world the most characteristic elements of change in the world were the alternation of the seasons and the processes of life itself. How are these to be accounted for? How did it all begin? The most common answer is given in the creation stories of Mesopotamia, Egypt, and the cultures between them. A number of such creation stories is now available. They are not creation stories alone, for they deal with theogony first of all, with the birth of the gods. The primeval waters are simply "there" at the beginning, and associated with them are the divine pair from whom come the other deities. Creation of the universe then follows out of the struggle among the gods for the supreme position. The essential motif in the Babylonian stories in particular is the battle between the forces leading to chaos and destruction and those leading to order and stability. The latter win out, the boundaries of the seas are fixed, the heavens and the earth are formed, the luminaries set in their places, and mankind is created to serve the gods.

The primary analogy used to describe the making of the earth and its creatures is that between the heavenly and the earthly realms. What transpires on earth has its prototype in the heavenly region. This means that the entire structure of society is only preserved through conformity with the will of the gods. So long as the heavenly pattern is followed, just so long does cosmos prevail over chaos. The means by which the world order is secured is the responsibility of the divinely appointed officials of the society: the priests and their subordinates. On the day of the New Year the story of creation is publicly recited, certain ritual acts are performed, and the powers of chaos are overcome anew through the celebration of the victory of the state deity over the other gods bent upon destruction. The fertility of the soil, victory over enemies of the state, the regulation of the seasons and of society are all obtained through this cultic representation of the process by which the heavenly and the earthly order came into being. Creation stories thus belong to the cult and have as their purpose the securing of the cosmic order. Details vary greatly in the different cultures, but the primary purpose sketched above appears to have been rather uniform among these cultures.

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## THE CHRISTIAN SCHOLAR

### THE CREATION MOTIF IN THE BIBLICAL WORLD

Alone among the peoples of the ancient world the early Israelites developed a radically different view of the nature and the purpose of creation, although this view is clearly dependent upon the prevailing outlook. The Old Testament has not a word to say about theogony, the birth of the gods. Very little reflection remains in the Israelite literature which speaks of struggle, of a mighty battle by which Yahweh, the God of Israel, came to his authority. What remains is found in the poetic passages and is more in the nature of colorful imagery than accepted fact. Even in the reference to struggle and warfare with other powers, the powers are given historical concreteness (see Deut. 33:2-5; Judges 5:4-5; Habakkuk 3:3-15; Ps. 65:5-8; 68:7-14; 74:12-17; 89:5-18; Job 26:5-14, etc.).

About the best way to account for this new understanding of the creation motif in the Old Testament is to observe the historical dimension in the faith of this people. They have their origin as a people of God in the event of the Exodus. God has entered into their common life to save and to deliver. He is their God, they his people. Bound together by the deeds of salvation, by the covenant and its laws, they are set apart from among the peoples of the earth to be a "kingdom of priests and a holy nation" (Ex. 19:6). Their origin is thus historically fixed, their obligation is to be realized in history, their goal, their end is itself historical: that all the families of the earth receive blessing through them (Gen. 12:3).

This means that the book of Exodus is, in a sense, primary to that of Genesis. Genesis is the answer to the question, How did it happen that Yahweh our God has saved us, called us to be his people, and set before us this solemn obligation? It is therefore a particular process and sequence within the world of coming-into-being-and-passing-away on which the Israelite eye is focused. It is the process of saving history. God the Creator is God the Redeemer and the Lord of all time and history. He is the first and the last, (Isa. 44:6), the beginning and the end (Rev. 21:6). It is from this perspective that the creation stories in Genesis are to be understood.

### THE CREATION STORIES

The Old Testament's opening line reminds the reader that everything which is depends for its existence upon the action of the living God. This is an affirmation of faith which cannot be supported by any process of reflective thought. It is just as difficult to think of the eternality of time as to think of a beginning of time. Both appear to involve logical contradictions which are inescapable. Creation, therefore, is a term forever clothed in mystery. There is no conflict between "science" and "religion" on the matter of creation, since creation is an affirmation of faith not subject to proof or disproof by any discipline of human thought or investigation.



## CREATION

The Bible gives us two different versions of creation, each complementing the other. Both of them are presented as records of what actually happened. We may refer to them as myths or sagas, as designed to account for realities which lie beyond the realm of history as we define the term. For the biblical writers they are presented quite simply as primeval history, as the history of the beginning of mankind and his world.

It is not possible to do more than sketch the two stories. Genesis 1:1-2:4a is a carefully structured account by Israel's priests of the precise process by which the heaven and the earth were called into being by the divine Word. Behind the story is the desire to distinguish the Israelite view from the notions of creation current in the surrounding cultures. The primeval waters, unformed and inchoate, are illuminated by the creation of light. This is a reminder that the heavenly bodies are not gods at all; they are not necessary to God when he begins his work; they are not even on hand. The waters are divided into the heavenly, earthly and subterranean seas, held in place by the firmament of heaven and by the earth itself. No word is given about the heavenly arrangements, since for the Israelite this realm is God's alone.

The dry land is caused to produce vegetation, the seas and the skies are given their creatures, including the "lamps"; the sun, moon and stars. Then all animals and mankind are created and commanded to be fruitful and multiply. Man alone is created in the image and likeness of God. This much discussed verse (27) is perhaps best understood as a reference to man's real resemblance to God. The most distinguishing feature of the difference between man and the rest of creation is man's capacity for self-transcendence, his ability to be both subject and object in the created order. He is not God, but is a creature of God. As creature, however, he is commanded to have dominion over the entire creation. This is his mandate to possess the earth, to enjoy its fruits, ferret out its secrets, to bring it into subjugation for the sake of the purpose of God in creation. No more explicit biblical invitation to learning is imaginable.

When all God's work is done, he pronounces it to be "very good." Then he rests on the seventh day. Both labor and rest from labor are by this means justified and commanded. God has worked well, and now he rests. Man too is to work faithfully and well, and then to rest from his labors.

How different all this is from the creation records of the other cultures. Here is no violent struggle to bring order out of chaos, here no plurality of deities locked in mortal combat, here no degradation of mankind as slaves of the gods. The glory and the limitations of man are equally well attested. He is a creature of God; like God, but none the less a creature. The most noble of created things, but also the most responsible.

## THE CHRISTIAN SCHOLAR

The second story is much more a story (Gen. 2:4b-25). It begins in a way different from the first story and develops quite differently. When the Lord God began to create earth and heaven there was only a flat and barren wilderness. Then a mist (or perhaps a flood; the Hebrew word is obscure) arose and watered the wilderness and made possible the appearance of life. But the first created object is man, made from dust of the earth. The Lord God forms him, breathes breath into his nostrils, and he becomes a self, a "soul." For the Bible, a soul is a total self, consisting of body and spirit, or breath. When either body or breath is absent, there is no self, no soul.

The man is then placed in a garden. Elements of the paradise myth, known from other cultures, are prominent here. Within the garden stands a tree, from which the man may not eat on peril of his life. This is the story's way of reminding man both of his limitations and of his freedom. But the man is alone. Animals are made, brought to the man for their names (which means that their natures and functions are being defined), but when all have passed by, man still has no one who is his "over-against," who corresponds to him.

The woman is then made, taken from the body of the man. She is this over-against, who completes the existence of man. For this reason, we are told, a man leaves even father and mother to cleave to the woman. Naked and unashamed they stand before each other and before God, who appears as the lord of the garden. Here all is simplicity, naivete — but there is profundity beyond our grasp as well. The first story tells the creation story from the divine perspective; here the human perspective is evident. The intimacy between God and man is almost painfully displayed. The two stories taken together, however, reveal what creation meant to the Old Testament people. God is sovereign Lord. He is the author and the preserver of heaven and earth. Beside him there is no threatening or alien power except those which belong to his created order. Over these, man is commanded to rule. Limitations are fixed, but with the vast arena of the earth open to man. The story of man's failure to be a responsible and faithful custodian of the earth is then related in the following chapters.

### DEVELOPMENTS OF THE CREATION MOTIF IN THE BIBLE

Just as the creation stories have arisen out of the historical experiences of Israel, so the goal of history points to a new creation, to the consummation of that which began in creation. Creation and redemption thus belong inseparably together. What God began at the beginning, he will bring to full reality at the end. The eschatological passages (those concerned with the consummation of history) show clearly how this is understood. Only a few examples are given here. Isaiah 11:1-9 describes the fulfillment of the promise to Israel in language which returns to the paradise motif. When the shoot from the stump of Jesse appears, he will restore the order intended from the first. Righteousness, justice, wisdom and the fear of the Lord will prevail. Peace will return to nature and to history. The

## CREATION

earth will be full of the knowledge of the Lord as the waters cover the sea. Just as the boundary of the seas was fixed and the earth peopled at the beginning, so at the end God's kingly rule will cover the earth, fixed and secure.

When the people are in exile, with Jerusalem in ruins, the hope of Israel made into a mockery, there arises a prophet who tells of a new creation. The God who smote the primeval dragon, who divided the sea of Reeds, will prepare through the Arabian desert a path for the people of Israel to follow back to the promised land (see Isaiah 51:9-11; 40:1-11). New things are about to happen, unheard of things, by which God's creatures, called to be his people, become a light to the nations; when the one God, responsible for all which is, acts anew to establish his intended purpose in the eyes of all the nations (see especially Isaiah 42:1-9). These words from exile reveal as no others in the Old Testament how the motif of creation is connected with the final act of God by which mankind is to be redeemed.

The New Testament continues this understanding of the relation between creation and the end. Jesus' announcement that the time is fulfilled, that the kingdom of God is at hand is so to be understood (Mark 1:15, etc.). What God began in creation and with the fathers of old is now the fullest reality. God has come to dwell with man; as the true Israel his own Son is this light to the nations. The new creation is not, however, self-evidently there for nature and for history. Its abiding place, for the present, is the hearts of the faithful. They are new creations; the old has passed away and the new has come (II Cor. 5:17). This new reality is now the constitutive principle of their lives, and from the body of believers, the Church, it extends outward to affect and to redeem the world. The Christian has died to the elemental spirits of the universe and has been raised with Christ to newness of life. This requires of him that he live as a new creation, putting to death all which belongs to the old age, the age dealt its death-blow by the self-offering of the Son of God on the Cross (see Col. 2:20-3:17).

The final stage of the new creation still lies ahead. God's victory in the Crucified One is accomplished, but the public display and the new constituting of heaven and earth lie on the horizon of faith. At the end, the risen Son will return to establish before the eyes of all this new creation. He who is Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the end, comes to make all things new (Rev. 21:5-6). Then all who are thirsty may take of the water of life freely. The new city of Zion descends from the heaven, its gates constantly open by day, and there is no night. Now the new creation, foreshadowed in the old, is reality, visible to all, open to all on God's terms. No sun or moon is now required, "for the glory of God" its light, and its lamp is the Lamb" (Rev. 21:23).

# The Biblical Understanding of Miracle

HOWARD CLARK KEE



GENERATION AGO, "MIRACLE" was recognized as a call to battle in the warfare between science and religion. Nowadays the word has become a hackneyed, but still serviceable epithet applied by advertising agents to detergents and salad dressing, to antibiotics and automobiles. Nevertheless, anyone whose religious thinking has been influenced by the renewed emphasis on the Bible among present-day theologians, has been confronted by the problem of miracle. Anyone who has taught a course in religion has surely had students formulate for him the direct question: "Do miracles happen?"

To answer negatively on the basis that miracle would be a violation of inviolable natural laws is unsatisfactory, since many of the "laws of nature" have been discarded, and others, like timetables, are "subject to change without notice." Even the effort to explain miracle as the operation of a "higher law" is dubious, since this attempted solution also rests on an older structure of natural law that has now been shaken to its foundations. The rationalistic explanations of the biblical miracles, although they still appear occasionally in Sunday school lessons, were shown to be irrelevant for serious study of the New Testament by Albert Schweitzer and others more than fifty years ago. The significance of the story of Jesus' feeding the five thousand is generally regarded today as more profound than the suggestion, once seriously offered, that Jesus fed the people by shaming them into bringing their lunches out of hiding when the little boy offered his to Jesus.

Within authoritarian segments of the church today, there is a tendency to increase the stress on miracle, as though the authorities sought to demand that men discipline their intellects by crediting the incredible. For some, acceptance of miracle on an authoritarian basis dissolves the problem. But for many—especially for those who, in Reinhold Niebuhr's oft-quoted phrase, would like to take the Bible seriously without taking it literally—it is necessary to find a pattern of meaning in miracle as well as criteria for evaluating individual stories of miracle before one can answer the question whether or not miracles happen.

## I.

Contrary to the common definition of miracle as a deviation from the laws of nature, the biblical writers do not regard the universe as operating by laws at all. There is no such thing as "nature", in the sense of a force, immanent in the world, by which its function is empowered and guided. Rather, the universe was created by God, is sustained by God, and its destiny is determined by God's will. His will is not perceived as a blueprint, which, once it has been drawn up, cannot be deviated from. On the other hand, the will of God is not capricious, but orderly. The writer of Genesis (8:22) is confident that the world will continue its pattern of daily,

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## THE BIBLICAL UNDERSTANDING OF MIRACLE

seasonal and vegetal cycles. But the cycles are not the result of regulations built into the universe; they are indications of and expressions of the loving care of God for his creation.

The Bible's own term for the purpose of God and the actions on His part by which that purpose is fulfilled, is "the Word of God." The story of creation in Genesis 1 is filled with the twin phrases, "God spoke . . . and it was so." The creative word is not thought of as an idea or an abstract pattern (in the Platonic sense), but it is God's expressed purpose. For it to be expressed is tantamount to its being achieved: "God spoke . . . and it was so." In the New Testament, the same conviction about the word is asserted: in the prologue to the Gospel of John, the Word is the One through whom all things were made. In the Letter to the Hebrews, the Son, who is the Word, upholds all things by the word of his power (Hebrews 1: 1-3). It would be a mistake to identify the New Testament understanding of the Word with the immanent Reason of the philosophers; there are points of contact between the two, and undoubtedly the Christian writers chose the term just because it would provide a basis for rapport with pagan intellectuals. But the Word in the New Testament is not a divine essence; it is a divine action. The word of God is God at work, fulfilling his purpose in creating the world, sustaining it, and seeking to bring it into obedience to His will.

The classic description of the Word of God in the Bible is in Isaiah 55: 10-11: "For as the rain and snow come down from heaven, and return not thither but water the earth, making it bring forth and sprout, giving seed to the sower and bread to the eater, so shall my word be that goes forth out of my mouth; it shall not return to me empty, but it shall accomplish that which I purpose, and prosper in the thing to which I sent it." In the verses immediately preceding these, the author has reminded the people that the ways of God transcend human understanding; yet the world does not stand helpless, confronted by an inexorable unfolding of an inscrutable purpose. In the larger context, God tells of his love for his creation, and exhorts the nations to respond in obedient trust to his love for them. The power governing the universe, therefore, is not viewed as the operation of a set of laws which, once fixed, cannot be changed. There is not even the suggestion that natural law is the way God chose to have his creation function. Rather, God is always and everywhere at work in His creation by His Word, sustaining it, and summoning it to obey His voice.

## II

If the biblical view of the relation of God to the world has no place for natural law, or for miracle as a violation of natural law, in what way are we to understand the miraculous element that occupies such an important place in the Bible? The answer to this question is suggested by the terms that the biblical writers choose in describing the extraordinary events that we call miracles. The characteristic biblical terms for "miracle" are "sign" and "wonder." Although at times the Authorized Version wrongly translates the Hebrew and Greek words meaning



"sign" and "wonder" as "miracle", in that version "wonder" is found twice as frequently as "miracle", and "sign" occurs four times as often. Even in the seventeenth century, when miracle was more readily accepted than it is today, the translators sensed that the meaning of the phenomenon commonly called miracle was best conveyed by the words "sign" and "wonder".

The supreme instance of "sign" in the Old Testament is the deliverance of Israel from bondage in Egypt. The recital of Israel's faith recorded in Deuteronomy 26:5-9 indicates the meaning of this sign for the community. It is that the Lord has acted in Israel's history, to deliver her from the calamity in which she found herself in servitude to the Pharaoh of Egypt. Not only does this act of God in behalf of His people shed meaning on the event of the Exodus itself; it also illuminates the prehistory of the nation by indicating that the hand of God was at work back to the time of Abraham, creating and preparing the nation for its chosen role under God.

Even a sign that seems on the surface to be a private favor, between God and an individual man of faith, is seen by the biblical writers to be God's action in history in behalf of His people. Hezekiah's curious request that the shadow of the sun on the dial reverse its direction is more than a personal reassurance; it promises the deliverance of the nation by God from the hand of the king of Assyria (II Kings 20: 5-11). The signs are not always promises of blessing, but may be warnings of judgment as well. The word of Jeremiah about the death of the Pharaoh on whom many in Judah were relying to save them from captivity in Babylon was a sign of the certainty of God's judgment upon them (Jeremiah 44:27-30). God was working within the history of the reigning dynasty of Egypt to execute judgment within the historical life of His disobedient people. Although these *sign*-ificant events often had a marvelous quality, they might also be as commonplace incidents in themselves as the birth of a child (Isaiah 7:14) or the death of one's wife (Ezekiel 24: 18, 24). In every case, however, they were regarded as manifestations for a particular purpose of the hand of God at work in history, fulfilling His will for His people, and through them for the creation.

Although the Bible regards these events as purposive actions of God—calling, judging, purifying and redeeming His people—the significance of the events for faith is not self-evident. One has only to turn to the records of the proud, boastful Mesopotamian kings, whose accounts of warfare with Judah and Israel have survived on inscriptions down to our own day, to see how very differently a series of historical events can be interpreted from within and from without the community of faith. For example in Sennacherib's own account of his return from Palestine to Assyria preserved on a prism now at the University of Chicago, he describes it as a triumphal procession of one who has conquered and plundered his enemies. In the Bible, the same incident is a sign (Isaiah 19: 20-37, esp. vs. 29) to the eyes of faith, showing that God has punished Sennacherib's arrogance and



## THE BIBLICAL UNDERSTANDING OF MIRACLE

has delivered the faithful of His people from his hand. The historical occurrence itself is subject to various interpretations, but viewed from within the community of faith it is known to be the action of God in behalf of His people. The events that constitute redemptive history are not in another sphere from the events of world history. Events that seem "wonder"-ful to men of faith are capable of ordinary explanations by others, or at least lack the meaning that faith discerns within them. But from within the community, they are seen to be in truth signs, *i.e.*, they point beyond themselves to a greater reality of which they give only a partial indication. The signs, wonders and mighty acts of the biblical record are indications of the redemptive purpose of God, only dimly seen, yet being revealed as in process of fulfillment through these events which are His acts.

### III.

In the New Testament, as in the Old, the characteristic word to describe the extraordinary acts of God in history is "sign". The description of the signs performed by Jesus is the main concern of the Gospel of John (20: 30, 31). But the signs that Jesus did are also an important factor in the summary statements of the primitive Christian message preserved in Acts (2:22; 4:30; 10:38). Important though they are, it would be a mistake to suppose that the signs are performed in order to prove Jesus' deity. It is clear from the Gospel of John, where the signs are given a more prominent place than anywhere else in the New Testament, that there is nothing about the signs of Jesus that automatically evokes faith. Jesus is reported on several occasions in the Gospel of John as urging men to believe him because of his works (*i.e.* signs), but the very fact that he must solicit this response indicates that there are those who witness his wonderful acts and still do not believe in him (10:38; 11: 47, 48).

Even more surprising than the fact that the proofs leave many unconvinced, is the attitude of Jesus himself toward these signs. Although Christian apologists from earliest times turned to the signs as demonstrations of the divinity of Jesus, he refused to perform signs in order to authenticate himself to his hostile contemporaries. Even though the temptation stories are probably to be understood as possible lines of action that presented themselves to Jesus throughout his life, rather than as single incidents that occurred at the start of his ministry, they point up one important truth: Jesus would not "do a miracle" in order to attract a crowd or to rally support for his cause. When his enemies pressed him to perform a sign in order to demonstrate that God had sent him, he flatly refused (Mark 8:11, 12). When his signs aroused among the people prideful nationalistic hopes, Jesus fled from the crowd that sought to acclaim him as messiah on their terms (John 6: 15).

The signs that Jesus does — healing the sick, restoring sight to the blind, casting out demons — are, however, of paramount importance for Jesus' understanding of his mission as the gospels present it. There are two incidents in which questions are raised about the authority and objectives of Jesus' activity by those who are

perplexed by or actively opposed to his work. The first came in the form of a question from John the Baptist, after he had been imprisoned: "Are you he who is to come, or shall we look for another?" The answer of Jesus is indirect, and yet forcefully calls attention to the significance of his acts: "The blind receive their sight, the lame walk, lepers are cleansed . . ." (Luke 7: 22). It is in these acts of mercy that the real intent of Jesus' role is being made known. The other issue arises when the Pharisees charge that Jesus performs his mighty works through the power of Satan. After showing that it would be folly to suppose that Satan would aid in his own destruction, Jesus says: "But if it is by the finger of God that I cast out demons, then the kingdom of God has come upon you" (Luke 11: 20). These acts, then, are signs that the power of God is at work through Jesus, bringing God's creation into subjection to himself, restoring men to the condition that God intended for them when He created them, liberating them from the powers of evil that hold them in bondage. God is at work, not just in a general way in the history of the nation, but in specific ways in the lives of men, redeeming them and fulfilling in them the purpose He had in creating them. The signs of Jesus are indications that the New Age, promised through the prophets, in which all the creation will be brought under obedience to the will of God — that this Age has already begun to dawn, and that its powers are already at work through Jesus.

The question arises immediately, what did Jesus actually do that gave rise to the interpretation of his activities in terms of signs? Some biblical scholars have written off the miracle stories of the gospels as apologetic devices, created by the Greek-speaking churches in order to enable the Christian's saviour to match the wonder-working exploits of the other saviours worshipped throughout the Hellenistic world. It is difficult to support this theory, however, when one recalls that it was the Jews who looked for signs to authenticate the gospel, while the Greeks sought for "wisdom" (I Corinthians 1: 22). On Paul's testimony, therefore, the obstacle to the progress of the gospel among the Greeks was the non-rational nature of the message, not a paucity of miraculous evidences for its claims.

The gospels devote more space to the stories of healing, exorcisms and the like than to ethics, although a common view of Jesus regards him as primarily an ethical teacher. There is a good deal more evidence that Jesus healed than that he pronounced the Golden Rule. The importance of the healing ministry in the attack that is brought on Jesus, both in the gospels and in the rabbinic records of the time makes it clear that Jesus was regarded as a healer, or, in the Talmudic term of opprobrium, a "sorcerer." The question is never raised, Did he heal?; the only quarrel concerns the authority by which he did it.

It is fruitless, then to ask, What *really* happened to make people think Jesus performed signs?; if by this we mean, How would a twentieth-century observer have described it? The only witnesses to whom we can turn for an answer are first-century witnesses, whose world-view and whose presuppositions about nature are so very different from our own. Some students of the Bible find it illuminating

## THE BIBLICAL UNDERSTANDING OF MIRACLE

to trace analogies between the acts of Jesus and recent development in the field of psychosomatic medicine. Jesus' healing of leprosy (a disease different from the one we know by this name) can be compared with the recently developed method of healing elephantiasis by hypnosis, for example. But the evidence from the gospels shows that Jesus did not regard himself as a medical genius, but as the agent of God, chosen to perform the initiating, yet decisive acts in overcoming the powers of evil and establishing God's rule over creation.

There are miracle stories in the gospels that lie to the side of, or even outside this context of meaning. The story of the coin in the fish's mouth is an amusing fable that ties in well with the problems arising over the relation of the Christian community to Judaism, but is hardly worthy of Jesus. The account of the feeding of the multitude, which appears in six different forms in the four gospels, is obviously repeated by the evangelists because of its significance as a eucharistic scene. In some of the versions, the word used to describe Jesus' prayer of thanks over the bread is *eucharisteo*, from which "eucharist" is transliterated. The stories of Jesus stilling the storm and walking on the water are surely told in the light of the Christian conviction that the same purpose of God that had been made known in Christ for the world's redemption had been at work "in the beginning" for the world's creation. Each "miracle" story must be evaluated by the degree to which it relates itself to the central concern of the New Testament for the redemptive purpose of God.

The signs, therefore, are events in which the *sign*-ificance is greater than the narrative itself conveys. The true sign in the biblical tradition is simply one facet of God's action in history, of a purpose which began with the creation and will end with the completion of the work of redemption, through which the whole of God's creation will be subjected to His will. This purpose is made known through acts in history. The records of each of these events accordingly is preserved in the thought-forms of a particular juncture in history at which the revealing act occurred. These acts are redemptive in character, in that they restore, reconcile, liberate, forgive, redeem God's creatures. The meaning of the events is not, however, self-evident; men may provide themselves with explanations of the events that satisfy them, but the eye of faith discerns in these events another factor at work which though not recognized by unfaith, provides the only satisfactory explanation. The man of faith perceives as the true *sign*-ificance of these wonderful acts that the creating-redeeming Word of God is here fulfilling its purpose. He recognizes it as in truth the Word of God, because antecedently he has come to know the Word made flesh in Jesus of Nazareth.

# God's People Israel, the Church and the World

JOSEPH HAROUTUNIAN



THE EARLIEST CHRISTIANS regarded themselves as the true Israel. Theirs was a company who believed that the Messiah whom the prophets had foretold and their people had expected, had come in the person of Jesus of Nazareth. They were distinguished from their fellow Jews in believing that prophecy had been fulfilled and the age of the Messiah had come. Hence, they neither followed a new religion nor set out to establish a new institution. On the contrary, it was essential to their faith that they belonged to the people of God who had received the promises and the prophecies which had been fulfilled among them. Jesus had suffered, died and risen "according to the Scriptures". This little phrase excludes the notion that the Christian Church was a novelty apart from the Israel of God.

The Church to which the early Christian belonged was as old as Abraham. It was the "holy nation" formed by the deliverance of certain tribes from "the land of Egypt, the house of bondage"; the people who entered into a covenant with the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, who wandered in the wilderness for forty years, plagued by rebellion and suffering; the people whom their God led to the promised land, and made a great nation, and ruled over them by kings and dealt with them by the prophets and priests. The Church was this nation which lived by the mercy and the judgments of God, and looked forward to the day when the Lord's Anointed would come and bring peace in all the earth.

In a sense, we have not gone back far enough. The call of Abram and the events which followed, presuppose the creation of the world, and of man, male and female, in the image of God. They presuppose the corruption of a good world and the loss of a good life in it through man's disobedience to God and alienation from him, with the iniquities and miseries which follow in their train. They presuppose the sin and bondage of man which God set himself to overcome through the call of Abraham and the subsequent "history of redemption".

So, even while the Church is a special people, with a specific history recorded in "the Law and the Prophets", its significance is universal. It is a Church in the context of humanity and human history, and even of the total creation. The history of the Church would be meaningless without its background of universal history, of the whole life of man on earth. The story of Israel, with its call, bondage and deliverance, covenant, sin, judgment and messianic hope, illumines human existence as such. It points on the one hand to the drama of the "human enterprise," and on the other to the revelation of its meaning in Jesus Christ.

i. *Call.* Call, sin, deliverance, covenant, judgment, fulfillment and hope — which characterize "sacred history," illumine the total life of man. The life of man

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is a call to a common life of love and cooperation, a common struggle and a common triumph. Man is created in and for community. Being man, not beast, he is *called*. Community is at once his nature, and his task and responsibility. He is not simply a social being. He is a being who must choose, decide, to live as the social being who exercises care and justice. Even while he satisfies his "natural" needs as an animal and a being endowed with his "higher sensibilities," he must seek justice and love mercy. As man who has life as a gift, he is under a mandate. He is called, and he must respond. He must respond in obedience — in freedom and in love.

2. *Sin and deliverance.* Man has responded to this call with disobedience, and in that act disrupted his common life. Not satisfied with the life God has given him as a creature, he has lusted after a divinity which is as illegitimate as it is unavailable. There is a mystery here which is the mystery of man. Man cannot rest content with his animality, and when he seeks to transcend it, he grasps for divinity: an act which is unnatural and sinful. As we are taught in Scripture, the transcendence of man consists in his freedom before his Creator, and not in his own infinity, or divinity. And yet, this transcendence expresses itself in rebellion against his finitude, and all the miseries which ensue from it. Thus man is found in "the land of Egypt, the house of bondage." There is a temptation to which he yields, and yielding he is at once in sin and in bondage. His apparently natural way is to live in anxiety for his life; to set himself and his good against his fellow-man and their good; to disrupt community, to violate humanity and thus to create a Hobbsean society in which social life is possible only through power and empire.

But God the Creator has not abandoned his creation. Out of a people who were not a people, a community, he has created "a holy nation," an authentic people, who are in covenant with God and live under his mercy and judgment. This he has done by a mighty act of deliverance from "the power of sin, death, the devil, and wrath." Israel's deliverance from Egypt is at once a sign of God's purpose for mankind and prophetic of the mission of Jesus Christ. When we turn over minds to the "history" of Israel, we must not lose sight of God's redeeming work among all his creatures. The story of Israel is bound up with the universal story of man, and the prime actor in this story is God the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. In Christ, the scene of God's action is revealed as "the world", and the deliverance from Egypt is seen as the anticipation and signification of that deliverance in Christ which makes a *human* society possible. Authentic community presupposes deliverance from "the power of sin and death".

3. *Covenant.* Deliverance is into community, peoplehood, and community exists by a covenant between God and a people; a covenant by which the people accept the law of God which binds them to God and one to another in love, which in turn works by respect for God's creatures and justice toward them. Covenant following upon deliverance means that a lost freedom has been restored as the



true basis of a common life for human beings. The deliverance of Israel from Egypt and the covenant which bound a "holy nation" to God, mean more than a deliverance from a pharaoh and a political covenant which became normative for a particular people. The exodus became the sign of that deliverance which means not only political but also spiritual freedom: The freedom from sin without which there can be no people of God, or under God. Thus the real meaning of the political event which created Israel became apparent in "the law and the prophets," and decisively and correctly in Jesus Christ. The elaborate, agitated, miracle-full, accounts of the exodus in the book by that name, show that the writers themselves saw in it more than a past event in the history of their people. The goodness and power of God manifested in the exodus pointed to a bondage deeper than that of Egypt and to a deliverance more relevant and wonderful than the escape of Egypt. The mercy of God was ever present, sustaining a rebellious people as God's people, covering sin and making peace. So it was with Israel; so it is with us; so it is with the universal struggle for a human society. But we know this in the victory of Jesus Christ over "sin and death", and the work of the Spirit of God in the Church.

The "holy nation" lived by a covenant. The covenant between God and Israel was a covenant between the Creator and the creature, regulative of the common life. It was a covenant of life ratified by the shedding of blood; a covenant solemnized by the dread-full meeting with death; a covenant keeping which meant life and breaking which meant death. The scope and meaning of this covenant became clear in the death of Christ which established it once for all between God and the creature. By it, man was bound to worship the living God alone and to do justly and love mercy with his neighbor. It was the covenant which expressed the true sovereignty of God, and the freedom of human beings in a community. It defined the law of God for Israel first, and for the Christian church afterwards: but in so doing it defined the essential nature of a human community. It is the Christian understanding of human society that it exists by justice and mercy, by the freedom to love one's neighbor as oneself. The covenant with Israel was no accident or anomaly in history. It was God's initiation of a movement which came to a head in union of the Creator and creature in Jesus Christ: and as such, it was the disclosure of the very meaning of human existence which is a common life rooted in the creature's consent to his life as such and in relation to his neighbor.

4. *Judgment.* The exodus and the covenant were followed by the "forty years' " wanderings before the people of God arrived at the land of promise: forty years of perils, privations, murmurings; of wrath and judgment and mercy. It is quite evident that this period was also profoundly meaningful to the biblical writers. In fact the sufferings in the desert became a parable of the controversy between God and his people throughout their history, a kind of philosophy of history which could be verified at any time. The people in fact forget God's great deliverance. They lapse into bondage and break the covenant. They live in peril and



they murmur. They dash themselves against God's righteousness, his mercy and faithfulness. Thus they live under his judgment and his wrath. There is hardly an aspect of the mind of God's people which is so characteristic, and as striking, as this conviction of an existence under the judgment of God. The Law and the Prophets saw to that, and so did the writings we call prophetic. Thus there is some validity to the impression that the God of Israel was a God of judgment and even of wrath; although judgment grew out of faithfulness and wrath out of mercy. God's people, whether as Israel or as the Christian Church, is characterized by a common life which is lived under covenant and in freedom; a life at all times exposed to the scrutiny of a faithful God: a life in which rebellion and repentance, despair and hope, warfare and peace, are perennial, under the salvation or righteousness of God. In fact and truth, in Canaan itself, the stories of the wanderings are relevant and meaningful. The enemy is always at the door. Peace is always precarious and suffering always coming. The people forget their God. They break the covenant. They forget their destiny and true good as God's people. So rebellions well up in the community: God's integrity is challenged; the people are confused and weakened; the enemy overcomes them. They would indeed perish a thousand times, were it not that God is faithful and he gives peace. In Jesus Christ and the work of the Spirit of God in the church, this understanding of history and community is not superseded; now, even more clearly, the people of God live by repentance and hope. Where such a knowledge of human society as being saved by God is obscured, its very existence is in jeopardy.

5. *Fulfillment and Hope.* But it is still true, and most certain, that the forty years in the wilderness ended in the entrance into and occupation of the promised land. God fulfilled the promise of the exodus. He had brought his people out of Egypt not so that they might wander in the desert, but that they might live in the land promised to their fathers. God finished his mighty work. He did overcome the enemies of his people and settled them in the land of milk and honey. He did give them judges, prophets, priests, kings, who fulfilled his purpose and established the holy nation in the land of their fathers. The point is that Deliverance had already occurred. The holy nation was already established. God did in truth now have his people, and his people had their God.

But the situation was not simple. The life of God's people was a life of controversy with their God and warfare with their neighbors. There were inhumanity, oppression, and enmity with misery, in the land. God indeed did have a people. But it was a rebellious and hard-to-change people. It was as though *this* people who violated God's law could hardly be his people; and their common corruption, the community of God. So, the people of God became a hope as well as an actuality. God's people looked forward to the day when the kingship of God would be manifest in the obedience of his people; when the people would respond to his faithfulness with their own, and to his mercy with justice and peace in the land. When the Messiah came and the promise was fulfilled in his victory over sin and death, the

## THE CHRISTIAN SCHOLAR

Church still lived by its hope for his coming in glory, when the people would respond to his faithfulness with theirs, and sin and death would be no more. Again, hope became essential to the very existence of God's people, and quickened its very life and made for that freedom which is in love. By hope what was and what was yet to be were at once distinguished one from the other and united one with the other in the living Church. Thus the hope of the Church has been the very life of the Church, the source of its peculiar faithfulness which is expressed in its sufferings as well as its triumphs, in its repentance as well as its obedience. Hope means that sin is very much with us. But it also means that we live by a freedom and righteousness which is in Christ Jesus.

Here again we have a community which, far from being an accident in this world, reveals the original and hidden meaning of our common life. Christ is the king not only of the Church but also of the world. Without hope there is no human life or society. Indeed, the empirical world presents us with a spectacle of many-sided and continuing evil. Inhumanities and miseries abound, and the hope of a peaceful and brotherly humanity is rather a despair of it. We are in no position to expect a society in which man's love for man shall establish a world of common well being. One can be more or less optimistic, but one cannot hope for such a thing as though its coming were sure. But still we live by hope as well as in despair. Our despair is by our sin, by our recognition that the roots of the evils among us are in us. Knowing this, we are quickened toward a humility which is the true sign of hope among us. Thus hope emerges in despair, not merely for a distant future, but for the immediate hour in which God himself shall give us peace and joy by turning our sin into an occasion for knowledge and faithfulness. So the mercy and the power of God work in this world, and a rebellious and stiffnecked people nevertheless exist as God's people.

In short, Israel, the Christian Church, and the "secular society" or the world, are unthinkable one apart from the others. If Israel and the Church are related as promise and fulfillment, the Church and the world are related as two aspects of the kingdom of Christ. In all three we have God's people, who exist by God's mercy and judgment. Israel gave the Church its Christ, and the Church must give the same Christ to the world: not as an alien and an intruder, but as the very source of its existence toward a "life together" which is both its essence and its destiny. There is one task, in Israel, in the Church, and in the world: that is, man's restoration to his integrity as a human being and to that common life of love which is its authentic expression. This task is the meaning of human existence, as well as the meaning of Israel and the Church. It is the meaning of history, both in the Church and in the world. Therefore, the Church is first and last God's people, the promise that the world itself is God's people.

## Progressive Revelation

GEORGE ERNEST WRIGHT

**R**ECENTLY A SMALL HEBREW class was reading the story of David's adultery with Bath-sheba, and of his subsequent elaborate attempt to cover his deed even to the extent of having the husband killed. Yet the thing was not hidden from God nor from his prophet. In the course of the latter's accusation the judgment of God was pronounced: "Thus says the Lord, Behold, I will raise up evil against you out of your own house; and I will take your wives before your eyes, and give them to your neighbor, and he shall lie with your wives in the sight of this sun" (2 Sam. 12:11). At this point one of the students asked: "How could a good God order or even threaten such a judgment? I can understand that justice requires the punishment of David but I cannot comprehend why the wives should be brought into it, especially when we must affirm the love and goodness of God!"

How shall such a question be answered? Shall we simply say that this is one of the nasty bits of Scripture and then pass it over for something that is nicer and more "spiritual?" During the past two or three generations the general tendency among biblical scholars and theologians was to do just this. They began at the point where our student began with his question: that is, with an initial assumption about goodness, love and beauty. These ideal entities are really what God is, or, at least, we must assume that these ideals represent God. Hence wherever one encounters material in the Bible that does not appear to be lovely, beautiful or good, then we cannot assume that it is a revelation of the true God; at best, what is revealed about God in such places must be on a fairly low level of conception. If God is good and loving, then we must see in the Bible many differing ethical conceptions. As one writer recently put it: "Blind adherence to the letter of Scripture takes no notice of the varying conceptions of different men in different periods. . . . It sees no difference between the conception of a God who orders Agag hewn to pieces before the altar, or who dashes the enemies' children against a stone, and the God and Father of Jesus Christ who taught, through St. Paul, 'If your enemy is hungry, feed him' (Romans 12:20) and who, on the Cross, asked forgiveness for his slayers."

In the Bible all agree that Jesus is the pinnacle of the story, representing in noblest form our ideals of goodness and love. These ideals with which we begin coincide perfectly with the person of Jesus. Hence, we assume that other things which are not so lovely in the Old Testament are of limited value.

Such a method of approach to the Bible was developed at a time when the idea of progress was being transferred from the natural sciences to human history, when evolution and the Bible were being adjusted one to another, and that not

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without considerable difficulty. Fit the above viewpoint into the idea of progress, apply both to the Bible, and the conception of "progressive revelation" emerges. This is simply that the spiritual, theological and ethical ideas in the Bible are not on one level. A growth has occurred. When Israel was a child, its ideas were crude and primitive; but as it matured, it gradually put away childish things; it discovered, especially through the work of the prophets, ever finer truths, until in the fulness of time Christ came as the climax and end of this fragment of evolutionary process. Turn the thing over, look at it from God's side, and the result is this: God gradually made his word known to people as they were capable of comprehending it. Yet progressive discovery of ever nobler ideas about God and the good is really what has been meant by "progressive revelation" as most people of the last two generations have used the term.

In our time, however, there is a question mark being placed beside such an approach to the Bible because, among other things, it fails to do justice to the Bible's own perspective. The questioner with whom we started began with an unanalyzed assumption concerning his ideals and God. His basic given was the identity of God and the good, as he understood the good, though the source of his knowledge of that good was unquestioned. Hence in his mind the Good as God could not reveal itself in the forms of historical evil. The tenth century writer of 2 Sam. 12, however, was a contemporary of the events described and of their aftermath. He is believed to have been a friend and a close observer of David's life and death. He wrote the verse in question, about the trouble that was to come out of David's own household and about the disgrace which was to be visited on the king through the public violation of his harem, in the light of what actually happened. From this point on in the story David has a series of troubles, and they came mostly from his own family. The worst blow of all was the rebellion of Absalom, which almost succeeded in its aim with the result that David was forced to flee for his life. When Absalom came to Jerusalem, he pitched a tent upon the palace roof and publicly violated his father's harem as a sign that he had taken over the reins of government and that his father's power was at an end. To the victor went the spoils, including the women, of the vanquished (see II Sam. 16: 21-22). In other words, the passage about God's judgment of David for his sin was written in the light of, and perhaps even colored by, what actually happened in the years that followed the Bath-sheba incident. It did not occur to the writer to question the matter or to wonder about the goodness of God. He understood this goodness full well, and he has portrayed his hero up to this point as a remarkable testimony to the wondrous grace of God who in David finally granted unto his people the first real security they had ever had. The extraordinary tokens of David's prowess and wisdom are taken as testimony to God's undeserved beneficence. Yet David sinned and terrible things happened to him when he was an old man. These to our court historian are facts of history. And these facts are the stuff with which theology must deal. He does not begin with any preconceived notions of what

God can or cannot do. He began with the testimony which was an interpretation from past experience that God was good, and he proceeded from that, through sin, into current and future historical reality. In the evil of Absalom's rebellious acts he saw the just hand of the good Lord, and that without absolving Absalom of his crime.

For many of us today there seems to be an order of the spiritual, a "spiritualism" which is assumed to be religious but which is somehow separated from the profane, from the "facts of life" or of historical experience. There are two realms, an above and a below, the ideal and the real. Yet for our biblical writer there was no such understanding of the spiritual. There is only one realm that is significant, that is the complex order of daily life, with, one might say, all of its political, social and economic aspects understood as the arena of revelation. This revelation was not primarily a series of ideals or ideas. It was the knowledge that the factual event, in our case David's acts toward Bath-sheba and Uriah, was not self explanatory apart from the claim of God upon his people. In the light of that claim David's deed was sin; it was "despising" God (II Sam. 12:9), and it would be followed by penalty. The subsequent rebellion of Absalom and the works associated with it are to be understood as a portion of that penalty. Our author is grappling with the complexities of history and he is attempting to understand their meaning. The clue to his procedure is not to be found in "spiritualizing", but simply in his attempt to comprehend what is. The stuff of his theology is the stuff of history. He does not ask how a good God could do this or that. What has happened, has happened and an attempt must be made to understand it, whether it is pretty or not. One does not begin with preconceived ideas of what God can or cannot do, but one tries to interpret what happened. Such a procedure will not lend itself to the construction of a coherent and convenient system of belief about God and the world. It will always have questions within it, for God does not remove the veil from his mystery. There will be continuous tension between justice and love, law and grace, meaningfulness and vanity. And the resolution of that tension may be seen in particular historic moments (that is, particularly in Christ), but the facts of history do not let it remain resolved.

Yet the question now arises as to whether the attempt to understand the meaning of events does not itself undergo refinement in the course of time, so that one can say that a development takes place. Does not the impact of Christ's life and death refine the primitive Church and cause a considerable gulf to be fixed between it and old Israel in numerous very important respects? Did not the break-up on the Judean community in 587 B. C. bring new issues to the fore which were not considered before? Is not this in some sense "progressive revelation?"

That the Bible has great variety and that new situations raised either new theological issues or old issues in new form is quite clear. Yet, scholars today are less willing to chart a simple course of development than they once were. Further-



## THE CHRISTIAN SCHOLAR

more, they generally believe that the earlier stages of the history must not be depressed to an extremely low level in order to make room for a particular scheme of development. Genesis 2-4 represent very early material, but they are no longer considered as simple relics of a primitive and naive anthropomorphism. In other words, present and future events were faced in the light of the knowledge gained from past events. And this knowledge of the past was continually tested in the light of the present situation. Past and present, "that which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, . . . of the Word of life, . . . declare we unto you, that ye also may have fellowship with us." All experience is in a measure unified under the same Lord who has made himself known in different ways. H. Richard Niebuhr in his book, *The Meaning of Revelation* (New York, 1941), pp. 135-36 has well summarized the shift in the understanding of progressive revelation as follows:

"Revelation is not progressive in the sense that we can substitute for the revelatory moment of Jesus Christ some other moment in our history and interpret the latter through the former. The monastic movement and the Reformation, modern evangelism and the social gospel, represent no progress beyond the New Testament in the sense that we may understand the latter through the former. Benedict and Luther must be interpreted through Christ and not vice versa; modern civilization and modern human life must be regarded as the scene of activity on the part of the Father of Jesus Christ, but Jesus cannot be rightly understood as the son of the god of modern culture. Nevertheless revelation is a moving thing in so far as its meaning is realized only by being brought to bear upon the interpretation and reconstruction of ever new human situations in an enduring movement, a single drama of divine and human action. So the God who revealed himself continues to reveal himself as the one God of all times and places."

In other words, our knowledge of God is real or meaningful, not when it is simply and solely expressed in ideals and principles, but when it is both applied to and drawn from the complexity of our human deeds and relationships. This means that it is never static, never fully expressible in abstractions, always alive and moving as is history itself. Revelation is an attitude, an expression of a relationship, an initiation into meaningful activity — it is all this before it is or can be a doctrine; it is never a truth apart from an event. Indeed, to define it as doctrine is to betray biblical faith. The word "faith" in the Bible refers to commitment, to trust and fidelity, to the nature of the relationship which the Faithful One has created. Ideas and doctrines, to be sure, are involved in faith, but their particular formation is so largely conditioned by the particular situation in which they appear it is difficult to systematize them. "New occasions teach new duties," and dutiful activity is never precisely the same in a new occasion as it was in an old one.

Nevertheless, there is a unity in what Professor Niebuhr calls "a single drama of divine and human action." And it is to that drama that the biblical canon bears witness. Yet what is the validity in the Church's conception of a closed canon? That the Song of Songs and Esther are within it, while I Maccabees is excluded is surely a decision of men. There are a few, though actually very few, borderline books within and without the canon which were debated and are debatable, but their in-



### PROGRESSIVE REVELATION

clusion or exclusion can actually change nothing that matters to the faith. On the other hand, the period from Abraham, through Christ, to John on Patmos is a certain definite and unrepeatable segment of history. In and through it the Bible reveals to us the true God and in so doing the meaning of all human existence. As a result, many people have lived and died, and many institutions have been formed or influenced; and these things are illumined only by what happened then. The Scriptural canon was closed by human decisions as noted above. Yet at the same time in a larger sense it is closed by God himself; it is normative in the sense that subsequent Christian teaching and teachers are to be understood in its light, and not the other way around. The canon does not give us a complete creedal system that is sufficient for any and every age without theological struggle and involvement. Nor does it provide a system of ethics to which no new ethical insight can ever be added. It is nevertheless normative in that it binds me in the Church and through Christ to the true God; it sharpens my wits to beware of idolatry and to confess my sin of idolatry; it commands me to love God *and* my neighbor, though it does not tell me precisely how, other than to give examples of what was once done; and it so changes and conditions my point of viewing that in company with God's people, past and present, I approach our common life with a sense of vocation and destiny. In so doing I encounter faith, love and hope, not as teachable traits of character, but as the goods that are given me by the faithful and loving One.

## The Biblical Ethic of Obedience

BERNHARD W. ANDERSON



O MOST OF US THE WORD "obedience" is a rock of offense. Whether found in the marriage covenant, loyalty oaths, or Scripture, it smacks too much of the sovereignty against which freedom-loving men have revolted. Valid as the modern revolt has been in the political arena, it has resulted in great confusion in the sphere of ethics, as the investigations of the Kefauver Committee have disclosed.<sup>1</sup> Individualism, supported by the relativism of modern thought, has produced a situation not unlike that which horrified the editor of the Book of Judges: "In those days there was no king in Israel; every man did what was right in his own eyes." (Judges 21:25) Today ethical obligation is usually defined by the reason or desire of the autonomous individual. The goal of life is to attain personal happiness, either by hedonistic search for the comforts of modern civilization, or by the more sophisticated search for self-realization. This popular ethic is qualified by the consideration that, to attain this goal, personal freedom must be restrained in the interest of the rights of other people, the greatest good for society as a whole, or the preservation of the American Way of Life. It is commonly believed that religion is important in the search for the good life, for God (or just "faith") helps men realize their highest personal and social welfare.

In the Bible ethical obligation is motivated not by man's search for self- or social-realization, but by his response to the sovereignty of God. Man's whole life is to be presented in *service* to God, as a "living sacrifice." (Romans 12:1) Hence in the Bible ethics cannot be detached from theology, as the close relation between the First and Second Commandments shows, for man shows his love to God by loving his neighbor. (Mark 12:28-31) The context of ethical obligation is man's relationship to God. Apart from this relationship there is no biblical ethic.

Since God is King over man's life, man's response to his sovereign is that of either obedience or disobedience. I Samuel 15 presents an interesting example of ethical obligation. From our point of view, Samuel's action in destroying Agag was highly unethical. The point of the story, however, is that Saul took things into his own hands, thereby defying the divine demand for "holy war" against the Amalekites. Hence Samuel is reported to have rebuked him by saying "To obey is better than sacrifice." Later prophets, of course, understood more clearly and profoundly how men should serve God, but they continued to stress the obligation of obedience. In a time when Israel's social injustices were evidences of a rebellious will, Jeremiah reminded the people of their relationship to God: "Obey my voice, and I will be your God and you will be my people." (Jeremiah 7:23) And, said the apostles, "We must obey God rather than men." (Acts 5:29) It needs to be said emphatically that there is great variety in the Bible with respect to the understanding of the will

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<sup>1</sup>Report of the Subcommittee of Labor and Public Welfare of the United States Senate, *Ethical Standards in Government*.

## THE BIBLICAL ETHIC OF OBEDIENCE

of God in concrete situations. But the call to obedience is the fundamental and persistent theme of biblical ethics.

Obedience does not mean just living up to commandments written in a law code, although admittedly this view prevailed in later Judaism and in the Pharisaical circles criticized by Jesus. The Hebrew verb "obey" literally means "hear." Obedience is *hearing* the word of God. It presupposes a personal relationship between speaker and hearer, between "I and thou." In the biblical faith man is not related to abstract, timeless ethical principles which are discovered and refined by speculative reason. Rather, man is related to the living God who makes a sovereign, personal claim upon his whole life. In this sense the God of the Bible, as Pascal said, is "the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, and not the God of the philosophers and the scientists."

In his magnificent essay, *Fear and Trembling*, Kierkegaard meditates on the obedience of Abraham who followed God's command to murder his only son, Isaac. In his interpretation of the story, Abraham was called to step out of the realm of universally valid ethics into the realm where faith is a personal relation between God and the solitary one. To speak of a "teleological suspension of the ethical" is both dangerous and unbiblical, as Martin Buber points out.<sup>2</sup> Nevertheless, on Kierkegaard's definition of ethics something biblically important is said in the essay, although it would be more accurate to say that biblical faith involves a heightening — not a suspension — of ethical responsibility. Biblical ethics is based on personal obedience to the "voice of God," not on submission to the impersonal principles of an ethical system.

To understand biblical ethics, then, we must explore the relationship between God and man. And this demands a consideration of the covenant which God established with his people on the basis of his deeds in history. The titles given to the two parts of the Bible, the Old Covenant and the New Covenant, rest upon the ancient religious motif of a covenant relationship between God and man. A great deal of light has been thrown on this subject by George E. Mendenhall's study of the covenant conception in the international treaties of the ancient Near East.<sup>3</sup> Here we shall summarize this study briefly. On the basis of an analysis of Hittite treaties, Mendenhall distinguishes two types of covenants, parity and suzerainty covenants. A parity covenant, he observes, is reciprocal; both parties bind themselves to each other by bilateral obligations. The suzerainty covenant, on the other hand, is more unilateral, for it is made between a king and his vassal. This is the kind of covenant which the sovereign "gives" to his vassal and within which the vassal finds protection and security. As the inferior party, the vassal is obligated to obey the commands stipulated by the suzerain, for the suzerain's words are spoken with the authority and majesty of the covenant author. However, this

<sup>2</sup>See Martin Buber's criticism of Kierkegaard in his chapter, "The Suspension of the Ethical" in *Eclipse of God* (Harper, 1952), pp. 149-56.

<sup>3</sup>George E. Mendenhall, *Law and Covenant in Israel and the Ancient Near East* (published by the Biblical Colloquium, Pittsburgh, Pa.) Reprinted from the *Biblical Archaeologist*, XVII, 2 (May 1954), pp. 26-46 and No. 3 (September 1954), pp. 49-76.

## THE CHRISTIAN SCHOLAR

covenant, while in no way infringing upon the sovereignty of the great king, is not just an assertion of his power over an inferior. The most striking aspect of the suzerainty covenant is the great attention given to the king's deeds of benevolence on behalf of the vassal. The vassal is obligated to obey his sovereign, but the motivation for obligation is that of *gratitude* for the deeds of benevolence done on his behalf. Obedience is the expression of a personal relationship. Indeed, it is striking that the suzerainty covenant is couched in the dialogue form, "I and thou." Legal stipulations are preceded by a preamble in the style "thus saith the great king" and by a historical prologue which recites the king's deeds of benevolence.

We cannot pursue further the details of this covenant form which was evidently well known at the time of the Mosaic covenant. Israel appropriated this political form to express her faith. Clearly, Israel's covenant was not a parity covenant, a bargain or commercial contract between equals. Rather, it was a covenant *given* by God, a relationship conferred upon the people by the Sovereign. Hence it was a covenant that required obedience. "All that the Lord has spoken we will do, and we will be obedient," Israel said in the ancient covenant ceremony (Exodus 24:7; cf. 19:5, 8). Notice, however, the historical context of the making of the covenant. It is preceded by a "historical prologue" which tells what God had done for his people, his "mighty acts" of deliverance at the time of the Exodus. Israel, then, was the servant of God, a servant who was treated as a son. Israel's whole existence was dependent upon the sovereignty of God, and within his covenant the people found security and meaning in history. However, obedience was motivated not by servile capitulation to the sovereign's power, but by gratitude for his mighty acts of deliverance — gratitude which was expressed in every celebration of the Passover Feast. Israel was beholden to the Lord: this was the basis of the unconditional obligation expressed in the word "obedience."

Israel's obligation was to be expressed in social responsibility. For the covenant is a social term. God's covenant was made with a people, not with a single individual. Indeed, God's will for his creation is that men should find the fullness of life in communion with him and in community with one another. The tragedy of human history, as sketched in Genesis 1-11, is the loss of the intended community, owing to man's estrangement from God and the consequent fracture of human relationships. The Bible tells the story of God's initiative to form a community, the community of the Old Covenant (Israel) and finally the community of the New Covenant (the Church). Within this social context men have access to God and are responsibly related to one another. In this sense, the Bible deals with social salvation.

As the great prophets tirelessly pointed out, the violation of man's responsibilities to his fellow man was a branch of Israel's relationship of God, for which God's judgment against Israel was revealed in history (Amos 3:1-2). To be sure, the covenant was a relationship which God had conferred upon his people. It rest-

## THE BIBLICAL ETHIC OF OBEDIENCE

ed upon his historical deeds of mercy, upon his "steadfast love" (*chesed*).<sup>4</sup> But men were required to serve God by showing steadfast love to one another. So in a great prophetic passage, twice quoted in the New Testament, the prophetic spokesman proclaims God's word:

I desire steadfast love( *chesed*) and not sacrifice,  
the knowledge of God, rather than burnt offerings. (Hosea 6:6)

According to this prophetic view, to know God is to acknowledge his sovereignty by fulfilling one's obligation to the fellow man. God's benevolence toward his people supplies the motive of gratitude, for, as Hosea says, Yahweh is Israel's Savior who demonstrated his love for his people by delivering them from Egypt (Hosea 11).

The acts of God in history provide not only the motive but also the pattern for human conduct. Through the remembrance of what God has done for his people, he teaches them how they should serve him in the present. Men know what "justice" is not by contemplating some abstract norm of justice, but by remembering how God delivered his people from oppression and bondage. Men know what "steadfast love" is by remembering and praising God for his great deeds of mercy. Hence it is significant that Micah, after a summary of "the saving acts of the Lord" in which memory focuses primarily on the Exodus (Micah 6:3-5), says:

He has *showed* you, O man, what is good,  
and what does the Lord require of you  
but to do justice, and to love kindness (*chesed*),  
and to walk humbly with your God? (Micah 6:8)

In the relationship of the covenant man's task is nothing less than "the imitation of God." It is, in the words of Martin Buber, "a following in God's footsteps and so serving His work in the world."<sup>5</sup>

Israel's ethic, then, was that of a servant. It was the ethic of the humble walk with God in willing obedience to his command. Specific commandments point beyond themselves to the one who commands, to the God who redeemed his people. This is evident in the case of the Ten Commandments which probably formed the legal content of the ancient Mosaic covenant. The Decalogue is preceded by a brief historical prologue: "I am the Lord your God who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage," and it is set in the covenant form of "I and thou" address (Exod. 20:2) God's revelation was not the disclosure of a set of laws or timeless ethical principles, but the disclosure of himself in personal encounter with Moses and his people in the event of the Exodus. The Ten Commandments, which reflect the stern mores of the desert, left a wide area of freedom for responding to the claim of God in concrete, decisional situations. "Because the divine will

<sup>4</sup>In the Revised Standard Version the Hebrew word *chesed*, a covenant term which is very difficult to translate into English, is usually rendered "steadfast love."

<sup>5</sup>Martin Buber, *The Prophetic Faith* (Macmillan, 1949), p. 102, 114. cf. Will Herberg, *Judaism and Modern Man* (Farrar, Strauss, and Young, 1951), pp. 96-97.



## THE CHRISTIAN SCHOLAR

is understood not as an impersonal law," writes Walther Eichrodt, "but as a personal will, relation to it does not rule out man's personal existence. But it includes it, and impels man to shape all his relations in responsibility and constant attentiveness to changing historical circumstances."<sup>6</sup> This accounts for the casuistic development of Israel's legal tradition, the long legislative accretion which finally resulted in the present form of the Pentateuch. God did not speak once and for all long ago, but he led his people forward in their history, calling them anew to decision and covenant renewal and teaching them in new situations the meaning of obedience.

There are, of course, tendencies in the Bible toward understanding the will of God in impersonal, legal terms, rather than in historical and personal terms. Once the Torah was codified in a book, whether the Code of Deuteronomy in the time of Josiah or the Pentateuch later on, men were tempted to believe that obedience to the "revealed" law would bring blessings. Obedience to the law tended to eclipse personal relationship to the Lawgiver, and led to the legalistic piety which had to wrestle with the problem of the suffering of the "righteous." But the deepest motive of Israel's faith was not a legalistic doctrine of rewards and punishment, a service of God *in order to* receive blessings. Rather, the motive was an *inner* obligation written upon the heart in gratitude for God's steadfast love toward his people (cf. Jeremiah 31:31-34).

The New Testament presents, on the one hand, a repudiation of the legalistic doctrine of rewards and punishments and, on the other, a renewal and fulfillment of the Mosaic covenant. The ethic of Jesus, as set forth in the Sermon on the Mount, is a Kingdom ethic. The sayings which have been gathered together in this "sermon" must be understood within the context of the vocation of Jesus and his preaching concerning the nearness of the Kingdom of God, the first signs of which were beginning to be seen in his ministry. While Jesus taught and deeply knew the meaning of the Fatherhood of God, his message brought to a climax the Old Testament motif of the kingship of God. Jesus proclaimed that God is King and that he is now beginning to inaugurate his Kingdom in history. Hence men were called to serve the King—not in submission to an overwhelming assertion of power, but in gratitude for his grace and forgiving love. On Jesus' lips the call to discipleship was a call to decision, a call to grateful obedience, a call to love God by showing love to the neighbor. Moreover, God's gracious actions were to be the pattern for human conduct: "Be ye perfect even as your Heavenly Father is perfect" (Matt. 5:48).

In the Gospel of Matthew the Sermon on the Mount is presented as the teaching of the Messiah, the One greater than Moses, who trod the path of the Suffering Servant to the Cross. To those who responded in faith, this decisive Event which occurred in the fullness of time—the advent, death, and resurrection of the Messiah—was the supreme display of God's sovereignty in history. Through this event God established a New Covenant with his people. A new community was created, embracing all who respond to the sovereign action of God in Christ. And according to the early Christian confession the sacrifice of the Suffering Servant was vicarious;

<sup>6</sup>Walther Eichrodt, *Man in the Old Testament* (SCM Press, 1951), p. 24.



## THE BIBLICAL ETHIC OF OBEDIENCE

it was on our behalf (I Cor. 15:3). In this confession is found the nerve of Christian ethical obligation. "It is historical event which establishes obligation," writes George Mendenhall; "the preceding act of God which confers a benefit upon the individual and the group both forms the motivation and ground for a lasting relationship by covenant, and at the same time brings about a willing obedience to the divine command."<sup>7</sup> The Christian ethical motive is stated simply but profoundly in the words of I John 4:11: "If God so loved us, we also ought to love one another." Moreover, God's display of his love through Christ is the basis of the Christian understanding of what love is—the kind of Christ-like love portrayed magnificently in I Corinthians 13. This is the highest spiritual gift: the imitation of Christ.

The Church is the community in which God's sovereignty in Christ is acknowledged by faith. In its life and worship the Church bears testimony to God's victory over the power of sin and death, a victory which is the basis of the New Covenant in which men are brought into a new relation with God and with one another. Within this covenant the Christian is not only given the security of God's love, but he is called to obedience and service. However, for the Christian ethical decision is complicated by his participation in the historical conflict which is still going on and which will continue until the very end. For while the Kingdom of God has been inaugurated in Christ, the Christian must work, pray and wait for the Kingdom which is yet to come. The New Age has arrived, but the old age has not yet passed away. One may be a "citizen of heaven," but he is also a citizen of the world, subject to its temptations and influenced by its perspectives. The Christian shares in the body of the New Man, Christ, but he knows also the persistence of the Old Adam. The conflict is intense, not only in the world but in the Church which is set within the world. How can one obey God faithfully when his ethical vision is blurred by his place on the battle-line? As we well know, Christians today do not easily come to agreement on their ethical responsibility in concrete situations.

The New Testament does not give any code of instructions to guide men in this conflict. Even the "law of love" does not provide a principle which can be applied to social situations. Rather, it points to the God who has so loved the world that grateful men are under an *inner* obligation to love one another in the same manner. But in this sense love is the end of the law. Since men are related not to an impersonal principle but to the God who loves, the New Covenant gives men a wide area of freedom within God's service. Each concrete situation is a new occasion for decision and obedience. The Christian, however, is not left to flounder by himself in solitude, for he is a member of the Christian Community. Within this Community which has been established by God's initiative Christians together seek for the will of God in the changing, concrete situations of history. Together they worship, read the Bible, and discuss their ethical responsibility, believing that within the Church the Holy Spirit leads them into a clearer and deeper understanding of God's will. For although God has spoken decisively in Jesus Christ, his voice is not silent. The Living God continues to speak in the changing situations of history, calling his people to obey his voice.

<sup>7</sup>*Op. cit.*, p. 49.

## Christology — as a problem of translation

KRISTER STENDAHL



THE WORD "THEOLOGY" BELONGS TO THE accepted technical terminology of educated men. To be sure, to many a Christian it has not too positive connotations. Christianity to him is a way of life, while theology is a catchword for a more or less hair-splitting enterprise which does not look too fruitful to the common believer. However, once we have recognized that everybody actually has a theology, whether he knows it or not, then we start to appreciate the value of spelling out and clarifying what our beliefs and attitudes as Christians actually mean and imply. To know oneself better is to be more conscious about what are otherwise vague feelings and strange reactions. And so, theology is the same increase in consciousness of one's faith and one's God. In spite of all the surface impressions of theology as irrelevant, it may be stated that faith without theology disintegrates into irrelevant confusion and a realm of feelings and convictions which cannot be related to other areas of life in a fresh, creative, and future-shaping way.

If this is true about theology, it certainly applies to that inner circle of Christian theology which is called christology, that is, the quest for what makes our religion and our theology a Christian one.

Christology is the doctrine about Christ. To many of us, this technical term reminds us of the so-called Christological controversies in the fourth century, when there were heated discussions—mingled with power-politics and prestige and other tokens of original sin—about whether it was right to say that Jesus was of "the same substance" or of "like substance" as the Father. Modern man feels himself very superior to these ages where Christians lost themselves and their love in fighting about such issues. Those who have understood a little more about what was at stake and what these terms meant in that time could, however, easily put us to shame by telling us that the vigor and intensity of the arguments also witness to the fact that there were men who took God and Jesus and revelation and truth more seriously than we do.

But Christianity had gone a long way before the Council of Nicea in 325. A long way, not only in time, (as from 1660 to our time), but also far from its original soil. It does not look to be very far on the map from Jerusalem to Alexandria or Nicea or Ephesus, but that distance implies the migration from the Jewish and Semitic world into the Greek culture and language and modes of thought. This migration is pictured already inside the New Testament. For this very reason, the New Testament gives us not only the authoritative and most original basis for our faith, but it also gives us a help to see how the early Church found the means to affirm what Jesus meant to them, as they had to translate their faith into a language and a culture other than that of their Master.

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Few people recognize what they are saying when they say "Jesus Christ." It sounds like a name such as Pontius Pilate or Julius Caesar. Actually, the latter is of interest to us here, since "Caesar" was a family name which later became a title, while "Christ" is the title which already in the New Testament loses its character of a title and becomes a second name. Christ (*christos*) is the verbal Greek translation of the Hebrew term Messiah (*mashiach*), both meaning "the anointed one" as a designation for the king. It is easy to see why Messiah or Christ was abandoned as a title. The use of such a title presupposed listeners or readers with the Messianic expectations of the Jews. The first chapters of Acts give us this picture: "And every day in the Temple and at home they did not cease teaching and preaching Jesus as *the Christ*" (Acts 5:42). Thus "Jesus Christ" is the nucleus of the creed, the confession of faith: We believe that Jesus of Nazareth is the Messiah. When Christianity went west into the Gentile world, this very same claim had to be "translated," and thus we find another formula; "Jesus is Lord" when Paul is writing to the Corinthians (I Cor. 12:3). In both cases, the same fact and the same belief is stated. In both cases it is clear that the heart of Christianity is the recognition of the paramount significance of Jesus: The first three gospels (Matthew, Mark, and Luke) have, roughly speaking, in the middle of them the question of Jesus to his disciples: "Whom do you say that I am?" And the answer is: "You are the Messiah" (Mark 8:29, cf. Matt. 16:16, Luke 9:20). It may sound like an overstatement, but I think it is true to say that the word "to believe" in ninety per cent of all cases where it is used in the New Testament means basically "to accept the claim of Jesus to be the Messiah" and to act according to that fact.

In its affirmation of Jesus as Christ and Lord, the New Testament uses an abundance of names and titles and descriptions. In a recent book, called *The Names of Jesus*, Vincent Taylor has listed and analyzed more than fifty such names and titles. In the minds of the readers of the Bible, these names are pieces by which the glorious mosaic of New Testament christology is made up. A closer study of that mosaic is rewarding, since, in spite of the fact that they join together in one picture, they all have their distinctive meaning and connotation. We will focus our attention on some of the most important ones.

In Acts 5, we find the names of two men who, shortly before Jesus, had claimed to be the Messiah or, as it is said in more concealed words, they "gave themselves out to be somebody." Theudas and Judas from Galilee had enjoyed quite a following for a while, and Gamaliel, the great Jewish teacher of Paul, intimates that the followers of Jesus will give up their faith, too. This little passage indicates that Jesus was not alone as a pretendant to the Messiahship. The recently discovered library of the Essene community at Qumran near the Dead Sea gives us better evidence than we have ever hoped for that the time of Jesus was exposed to many Messianic claims. The sect at Qumran called itself the Community of the New Covenant (or New Testament, if you like), and the striking similarities between this sect and primitive Christianity are the best means we have to understand what our New Testament means by its confession of Jesus as the Messiah. Both the Es-

senes and Jesus claimed to be the fulfillment of the Old Testament prophecies. They did not advertise themselves as a new religion. The very structure and content of their faith and ethics was conditioned by the Old Testament. Both could speak about a new covenant, new commandments, a new age, new interpretations, but they were primarily anxious to make clear that "yet it is old" (I John 2:7); it is only the consummation of God's old revelation.

Thus we find the first disciples of Jesus in a situation of choice and competition. To us all, these competing Messiahs of the first century have disappeared—while at the same time we are surrounded by many "messianic" movements which try to offer their answers to our needs and hopes. But when we read the gospels, it is meaningful and helpful to recapture the picture of how Jesus in His own time was not a monumental unique figure but one among others who raised the Messianic claim. When we read about how difficult it was for the disciples to make up their minds, it seems so strange for us. But it was a hard thing, and they ran a great risk of being wrong in their choice.

It is certainly true to say that Jesus did not make it easier for them. He left them to the choice of faith and did not give them the certainty of knowledge. He avoided calling himself Messiah. He calls himself the Son of Man. We used to say that he preferred this term because the term Messiah suggested a kind of earthly king who was expected to gather the faithful and lead them in a victorious war against the Roman army, which kept the country occupied. This may be true, but it is not as certain as it used to be. The Qumran documents and our better knowledge of pharisaism indicates that "Messiah" did not necessarily have those mundane implications. What is sure, however, is that the term Son of Man does not imply that Jesus wanted to stress that he refrained from heavenly and high religious claims. He did not call himself the Son of Man in order to identify himself with humankind. The Son of Man had a distinct meaning in the ears of his audience. Compared with "Messiah," it had not a less but a more heavenly ring. The Son of Man was the term by which the apocalyptic literature spoke of the Messiah as a strange, heavenly figure, coming down from on high at the end of time in order to redeem the faithful and elect and to judge the wrongdoers and the enemies of God. If Jesus uses this title in order to avoid the political and martial connotation of the title "Messiah," he does it by stressing the transcendence and the miraculous character of his mission, not in order to sound more human in his religious views.

The New Testament is certainly faithful to historical facts when it pictures the Galilean and Judean ministry of Jesus only as a prelude, an overture to the full-fledged Messiahship of Jesus. It is first after Calvary and Easter morning that Jesus is the enthroned king, the Messiah. In the early preaching of the Church, as well as in Paul's epistles and in the rest of the early Christian literature, there is an amazingly small amount of references to the earthly ministry of Jesus. Even the Gospels themselves witness to this fact by devoting as many pages as they do to the passion and the resurrection. To the early Church, that which God did with Jesus

in his death and resurrection was the basis for their faith. If this had not been the fact to them, they would have shared the disappointment of the men on the way to Emmaus: "But we had hoped that he was the one to redeem Israel" (Luke 24:21). Therefore, it is true to say that christology begins with the resurrection. To us, the resurrection usually is meaningful as a token of immortality. It seems to be Paul the theologian who combined Christ's resurrection with the resurrection of the believers. To start with, however, the resurrection was the decisive argument for Jesus as the Messiah. In the first "translation" to Gentile listeners the resurrection is the act by which God has made known to the world that the final judgment is impending and that Jesus will be the Judge of mankind (Acts 17:31, cf. 10:42). In the Jewish setting this very same resurrection was the event which cancelled the disastrous impression of Messiah's crucifixion and gave the suffering of Christ its deep significance of a redemptive sacrifice, a sacrifice which Paul describes: "God was in Christ reconciling the world to himself." (II Cor. 5:19).

"God was in Christ" says Paul. We can take this statement as an early attempt to define the relation between God and Christ, and yet we have to be careful because we do not find Paul aware of the problem which preoccupied the Greek Fathers of subsequent centuries when they tried to define the relations between God the Father and Christ the Son. Greeks as they were, they thought in terms of "essence" and "nature" and "substance," and they had to find appropriate formulae for how the divine and the human "natures" coexisted in Christ. To Paul this was no problem. Jesus was the Messiah, and, as the Messiah, he was the Son of God—as the kings in the Near East had been considered from oldest times and as the Israelites had thought of David and his successors: "Thou art my Son; this day [the day of enthronement] have I begotten thee" (Ps. 2:7, cf. Luke 3:22). This sonship did not presuppose a virgin birth. It is possible that the virgin birth belonged to the traditions which had been handed over to Paul, but he never refers to them. It is significant that it is Luke, the most Greek of the evangelists, who makes the connection between the title "Son of God" and his being conceived by the Holy Spirit (Luke 1:35). Matthew, who also bears extensive witness to the virgin birth, is too much a Jew to make this connection. And to Paul the enthronement as Messiah, as Son of God, is made manifest "by the resurrection of the dead" (Rom. 1:4).

In the Gospel of John, the coming of the Messiah is described as an incarnation. "... and the word [the Logos] was made flesh" (John 1:14). Even here there is no speculation about the interplay between human and divine nature in Christ. We are still in the context where Son of God is a title for the King of Israel (John 1:49), for the Messiah (11:27; 20:31). The Johannine doctrine of incarnation wants to state that God did not only put on a display of grace as from afar off, but that he acted directly, not only through history, but in history in Jesus Christ. Thus, even John thinks in terms of "function" and not in terms of "substance." God acts in his Messiah, his Son. This is the point which concerns the evangelists as well as the New Testament at large. "No one has ever seen God; the only Son,



## THE CHRISTIAN SCHOLAR

who is in the bosom of the Father, he has made him known" (John 1:19).

When the original statements of God and his Son the Messiah were transferred into Greek culture where the questions asked were not those of function, representation, anticipation and consummation—as they were in the Semitic world—but the questions of being, then the second phase of christology starts. The New Testament saw God at work through his Messiah, fully represented in him ("He who has seen me has seen the Father," John 14:9). The Kingdom of God was present (Matt. 12:28) and yet to come (Matt. 26:29). Now the Greek Fathers asked not *who* Jesus was (Mark 8:22) but *what* he was. And one of the classical answers is: "... only-begotten Son of God, Begotten of his Father before all worlds, God of God, Light of Light, Very God of Very God, Begotten, not made, Being of one substance with the Father . . ." (the Nicene Creed).

Here every sentence is loaded with deep insight, and everything is in that balance which is the mark of good orthodoxy. Here is a translation into a sphere of thought which raised questions unforeseen by the New Testament writers. Here theological consequences are drawn and carefully defined. This is great theological art, a challenge and a perpetual inspiration to Christendom. We will always come back to the great creeds of the Church. In one way, they stay unsurpassed in their theological intensity. At the same time, it must be said that orthodoxy is not a matter of repeating great words. It also implies the need for "translation" into our own world, by men and women whose minds are alerted by the new questions to be asked. And the translation must be from the original. And the original of our christology is not even the christology of the New Testament but the fact of Jesus Christ himself who is the same yesterday and today and forever. The heart of the New Testament witness to Jesus as the Messiah is namely that Christianity is not a doctrine or a system or a way of life or a religion, but a man in whom God worked out his salvation. And therefore the crucial question is that of Jesus: "Whom do you say that I am?"

## CORRECTION

In the September 1955 (Volume xxxviii, Number 3) issue of *The Christian Scholar* a report entitled "A Research Project" stated that Dr. William P. Alston was granted a Ford Fellowship for a research study on "The

Semantic and Epistemological Status of Religious Assertions." The Western Division of the American Philosophical Association should have been named as the donor making possible this study.



## Books and Publications

### AN ANNOTATED BIBLIOGRAPHY ON BIBLICAL THEOLOGY

Because the space available here does not permit extensive reviews of many of the major writings currently available in the area of biblical studies, we are devoting some of this space to this annotated bibliography of certain selected volumes which can serve to introduce persons to this area of scholarship. Suggestions cannot, of course, be inclusive for all the major "schools" of thought and all the important problems encountered in biblical scholarship. The point of this listing is, nevertheless, to suggest some of the materials which have already proven their usefulness in private and group study of the Bible; using these will, in turn, bring other materials within the scope of more extensive study. Let it be noted, however, that the best source for Biblical study is, in any event, the Bible itself; it is even its own best commentary! Thus, this limited bibliography is proposed here as a guide to, rather than being in itself, the study of the Bible.

*Rediscovering the Bible.* By Bernhard W. Anderson. New York: Haddam House, 1951. This, as well as the same author's study guide, *The Unfolding Drama of the Bible* (Association Press, 1953), can serve as an excellent introduction to the study of biblical history, literature, and ideas, especially in relation to the special problems and questions which are posed by a biblical outlook for modern man. The Bible is viewed throughout as the record or drama of God's dealings with men, a drama which moves forward purposively through the unique series of historical events which culminate in the coming of Christ and the emergence of the Christian Church. Dr. Anderson is Dean and Professor of Biblical Theology at Drew Theological Seminary.

*God Was in Christ.* By D. M. Baillie. New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1948. The sub-title further indicates that this is "An Essay on Incarnation and Atonement." This book deals in a systematic way with the central question of the Christian Church: What think ye of Christ? The concern for "the Jesus of history" is present though primary attention is given to the christological problem of reconstructing in its full dimensions the message of Christianity concerning the mystery of Christ's person. Directed both to the theologian and the thoughtful modern man, this is an approach of great value to the central problem of Christian faith. An Epilogue is a re-telling of "the sacred story," the "unfolding drama" of biblical faith.

*Prophetic Realism and the Gospel.* By John Wick Bowman, professor at San Francisco Theological Seminary. Westminster Press, 1955. In this book, which carries the sub-title, "A Preface to Biblical Theology," the author observes that today there are three ways to write biblical theology. One he styles humanistic optimism, another apocalyptic pessimism, and the third — in his view the authentic mode — prophetic realism. Biblical theology does not rest upon man's alternating moods of optimistic confidence or pessimistic despair, but upon the meaningful and creative realism of God's revelation. Therefore, it is a theology of the Spirit. The main theme of the Gospel, running like a

## THE CHRISTIAN SCHOLAR

symphonic motif through the various sections of the New Testament, is God's redemptive acts on behalf of man. The prophetic witness of Scripture points to God's sovereign rule within history. His action to overcome man's sin and to restore him to the New Community.

*The Kingdom of God: The Biblical Concept and its Meaning for the Church.* By John Bright. New York and Nashville: Abingdom-Cokesbury Press, 1953. The theme refers to a way of holding together the variety of biblical materials in a unified way; it is treated historically because, as the author says, "biblical theology can be treated in no other way." Thus, it is a survey of biblical history and of the various cross-currents of theology which came into being in the struggle to interpret that history. For any who would like to be brought "up to date" in the biblical field, this is an excellent volume to begin with.<sup>1</sup>

*Prophetic Faith.* By Martin Buber, Professor of Religious Philosophy at Hebrew University, Jerusalem. Macmillan, 1949. Here the author of *I and Thou*, whose exposition of "relational thinking" has had a profound influence on theological discussion, proves his ability to lead one into the inner world of the Old Testament, the world of the Covenant. Some of his exegeses may strike one as being extravagant, but his discussion of the *relationship* between God and people is marked by extraordinary depth of theological insight. For one who seeks to understand biblical faith from within, rather than in terms of extraneous categories, this is a most helpful study. The book begins with the earliest covenant faith and moves through the monarchic and prophetic to the climax of Second Isaiah.

*Theology of the New Testament.* Volumes I and II. By Rudolf Bultmann. New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1951 and 1955. With the recent appearance of Volume II we now have in complete form this basic work on New Testament theology. The result of a life-time of scholarly work, these volumes set forth the controversial thesis that the biblical message must be extricated from the "mythology" which surrounds it in biblical form, if modern man is to sense its full significance. The author, until recently Professor at the University of Marburg, is a learned scholar whose independence of judgment is arresting and evocative. This work approaches the New Testament with a fresh and vivid concern for its message in the modern world; even for those who do not agree with the author's emphasis upon demythologizing (and there are many who disagree!), this is a contribution to biblical study of considerable magnitude.

*God Hidden and Revealed.* By John Dillenberger. Philadelphia: Muhlenberg Press, 1953. With the abundant emphasis on revelation in contemporary theology, this book recalls its important corollary, that revelation is set in and arises

<sup>1</sup>The notes are based upon a review prepared originally for *The Christian Scholar* by Professor G. Ernest Wright of McCormick Theological Seminary.

## BOOKS AND PUBLICATIONS

from mystery. The author shows that Martin Luther properly combined a Christ-centered faith with the fact of "the hiddenness of God" (*deus absconditus*). A closely-worked presentation of the primary commentators on this enigma, such as the Ritschlians, Karl Heim, the Seebergs, Paul Althaus, Rudolf Otto, and Karl Barth, suggests the breadth of investigation involved and the promise for those who will give it further exploration as a theological and biblical concern.<sup>2</sup>

*The Bible Today.* By C. H. Dodd, New York: Macmillan Co., 1947. An introductory study of the Bible by the most articulate advocate of the "realized eschatology" thesis in New Testament studies. The self-continuous, revealing history, culminating in Christ, is emphasized. This book was based on a series of "open lectures" at the University of Cambridge, and thus was intended for the laity in an intellectual context.

*The Root of the Vine: Essays in Biblical Theology.* By Anton Fridrichsen and other members of Uppsala University. New York: The Philosophical Library, 1953. One of the centers of a revolution which has been taking place in biblical studies during the past thirty years has been the "Uppsala School"; this book gives English readers their first opportunity to become acquainted with its contributions. All the essays are dominated by a determination to present a truly scientific approach to the Bible, i.e., to let its studies be governed by the native categories of the Bible itself rather than by the "evolutionism" and "idealism" of the "Historico-critical School". Though it is true that "schools," here as elsewhere, can become too defensive of their positions, it is also true that, in biblical theology at least, they can be centers of theological conversation which may have creative results in the life of the whole Church; they can be especially helpful in challenging the Church in its attitudes toward the Bible and its use of it.<sup>3</sup>

*Judaism and Modern Man.* By Will Herberg, Visiting Lecturer at Drew University. Farrar, Straus, and Young, 1951. This book, by a Jewish thinker in the tradition of Martin Buber and Franz Rosenzweig, expounds the Jewish faith within the existential context of the ideologies which compete for man's allegiance today. Herberg's concern for a recovery of the authentic basis of Israel's faith leads him back to the scriptural sources, with the result that biblical theology is the focus of attention in the book. His vigorous and penetrating exposition of the Israelite faith is articulated in three areas: God and man, God and history, and God and Israel. Throughout the discussion the

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<sup>2</sup>The notes are based upon a review prepared originally for *The Christian Scholar* by Dr. Harold A. Dunkelberger, Associate Professor of Bible and Religion at Gettysburg College in Pennsylvania.

<sup>3</sup>The notes are based upon a review prepared originally for *The Christian Scholar* by Dr. Bernhard W. Anderson, Dean and Professor of Biblical Theology at Drew Theological Seminary.

## THE CHRISTIAN SCHOLAR

reader is made aware of Herberg's deep appreciation of the Christian faith and his conviction regarding the basic correspondence between the faith of Israel and the Christian faith.

*Interpretation: A Journal of Bible and Theology.* Edited by the members of the faculty of Union Theological Seminary in Virginia. This magazine, the only one of its kind in this country, is designed for the alert layman and minister who desire to keep abreast of the best thinking in the field of biblical interpretation. Every issue contains articles by recognized biblical scholars on themes of biblical theology, specific books of the Bible and bibliographical studies. This is an excellent and valuable resource.

*The Fullness of Time.* By John Marsh. New York: Harper and Bros., 1952. This is one of a number of books in recent years devoted to an interpretation of the Bible's message concerning time and history. The contrast between the unique biblical conception and that which is prevalent in the Greek and in modern rationalistic views is made throughout this book. The use made by the author of the Exodus event—both as a way of interpreting the past and anticipating the future—is illuminating of his understanding of the biblical view of time as "opportunity"—an occasion for God to break into human history. The author then traces the implications of this view especially for the Christian view that Christ is to be understood as the fulfillment of time. The author is professor of theology at the University of Nottingham, England.

*The Meaning of Revelation.* By H. Richard Niebuhr, Professor of Christian Ethics at Yale Divinity School, Macmillan, 1941. Although not directly on the subject of biblical theology, this valuable book, which has had several printings, deserves mention in this bibliography, for it helps the modern reader to relate the biblical perspective to our present cultural situation. Especially important is the chapter entitled "The Story of Our Life" in which Niebuhr shows why the Christian faith by its very nature is committed to a historical approach. Also his distinction between external (objective) and internal ("our") history helps one to understand the character of the historical sense in the Bible and to comprehend what biblical theologians mean by *Heilsgeschichte* or "redemptive history." This is an excellent elucidation of the meaning of revelation.

*A Preface to Bible-Study.* By Alan Richardson. Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1944. One of the "small books" devoted to introducing the student to biblical study. It deals with the over-all structure of biblical thought, but it also furnishes practical suggestions for a method of biblical study. Once again the problems of the modern reader are taken into account. Revelation is viewed primarily as God's activity, not certain dictated doctrines or eternal ideas; the approach to Bible-study which proceeds from this is treated with sound theological acumen. By the author of *Christian Apologetics*, *The Gospel and*

## BOOKS AND PUBLICATIONS

*the Modern World*, and other books.

*The Unity of the Bible*, by H. H. Rowley, professor at the University of Manchester. Westminster Press, 1955. One of Great Britain's foremost Old Testament scholars emphasizes that the Bible displays unity within diversity. In six essays he considers the biblical dynamic in terms of a process of development in which the currents of the Old Testament flow to Christ and His Church. The two Testaments, however, are not related by a continuous evolutionary development, but by a paradoxical unity involving both the supersession of the Law of Moses and the fulfillment of the Old Testament pattern of revelation. Excellent reading for one who wants to keep abreast with the best biblical scholarship.

*Guide to the Christian Faith*. By William A. Spurrer. New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1952. As an "Introduction to Christian Doctrine," this book may not seem appropriately in its place in this listing. It is included, however, because the problem of biblical study is often complicated by the fact that the total structure of Christian belief is not sufficiently well in mind so that the Bible can speak its own edifying message. This is the attempt to set forth the essence of what is intended by the central beliefs of the majority of Christians throughout the Church's history, and in a way which shows their inescapable promptings by the biblical message itself.

*New Testament Theology*, by Ethelbert Stauffer, professor at the University of Erlangen. SCM Press, 1955. This German biblical theologian starts with the observation that the theology of the New Testament is rooted, not in Hellenism or rabbinic thought, but in a living tradition coming from the Old Testament via the intertestamental literature. In particular the New Testament writers, he affirms, were most at home in the world of apocalyptic ideas. His central thesis is that the New Testament expounds a "theology of history" from a Christocentric standpoint. The basic motifs of New Testament theology are identified as "doxological," "soteriological," and "antagonistic." To many readers this book will seem conservative in character, but it is an extremely valuable and enlightening work. In many ways it stands in striking contrast to Bultmann's *Theology*.

*Biblical Religion and the Search for Ultimate Reality*. By Paul Tillich. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1955. The eminent theologian's most recent volume, devoted, at the title suggests, to the contrast between philosophical and biblical language. However, he objects to the conclusion that this necessitates a divorce of the two traditions, since the biblical symbols drive inescapably toward ontological questions, and philosophy must always be brought into the service of theology if the theologian would do the task which is assigned him. Professor Tillich is now at Harvard University after more than two decades at Union Theological Seminary.



## THE CHRISTIAN SCHOLAR

*Otherworldliness and the New Testament.* By Amos N. Wilder. New York: Harper and Brothers, 1954. This is a careful scholar's reply to the charge against Christianity that it is otherworldly, escapist, and irrelevant to the problems of man's actual life here and now. This response is set against the background of what one finds in the New Testament, and it is to be noted that only a misunderstanding of the Gospels and the rest of the New Testament can be utilized if they would be appealed to in support of heretical forms of otherworldliness. Transcendent dimensions which are integrally part of Christianity should not be confused in such a way as to make Christianity otherworldly; God's work is intimately related to what we call the secular and natural factors of human experience. Now at the Harvard University Divinity School, Professor Wilder — also author of *Modern Poetry and the Christian Tradition* (New York, Charles Scribner's Sons, 1951) — was during recent years associated with the Chicago Theological Seminary and the Federated Theological Faculty of the University as Professor of New Testament Interpretation.

*God Who Acts*, by George Ernest Wright, professor at McCormick Theological Seminary. SCM Press, 1952. This is one of the most important monographs that have appeared in the field of biblical theology. Wright objects to the forcing of the data of the Bible into the structural framework of systematic theology, that is the customary rubrics of "the doctrine of God," the doctrine of man," etc. Aiming to write biblical theology in a form native to the Bible, he stresses the central importance of biblical confessions of "the mighty acts of the Lord" as seen in the decisive events of biblical history from the Exodus to the Crucifixion — Resurrection. Biblical theology, both in the Old and New Testaments is Kerygmatic; it is a theological *recital* of what God has done. Biblical theology, then, is a reflection upon these divine deeds within the community of faith.

*From Faith To Faith*, by B. Davie Napier; Harper and Brothers, New York, 1955. pp. 23. \$3.00.

Napier has written a book which exemplifies a sound approach to biblical theology, through study of the literature as belonging within but not confined to its historical context. He lets the Old Testament speak for itself, and seeks empathetic understanding of the faith which produced it and to which it testifies.

The author begins by noting current trends in Old Testament study to emphasize essential unity, distinctiveness and persistent themes. He lists six "central themes and presuppositions,"—faith in Yahweh as creator and sustainer, human sinfulness, consistent Divine judgment within history, the covenant faith, redemption and consummation. He then proceeds to examine the basic literary categories — myth, legend, history, prophecy and law — finding in all of them support for his conviction that they speak "from faith to faith." The Psalter is omitted be-

cause it is "self-evidently in a faith-to-faith category," and the Wisdom books because they "remained relatively peripheral and always more personal than communal in character" (p. ix).

This omission of the Wisdom literature, particularly the Book of Job, raises a question about the validity of a treatment that purports to deal with the common theological themes which unify the Old Testament. In fact, the material drawn on to support the author's thesis is definitely selective, and nearly half his space is devoted to Genesis where his case is strongest (and, so far as Genesis is concerned, convincing). The treatment of Samuel-Kings, Isaiah and the law codes is briefer and less cogent; at any rate it falls short of demonstrating the thesis that the same six theological themes give structure and unity to the entire literature.

To say no more than this, however, would be unfair. Genesis and Exodus (though the author has little or nothing to say about Exodus) are the core of the Old Testament canon; in a sense, everything else is commentary, — commentary and explication. Here Napier makes a profoundly significant point, in speaking of "the creation faith": "the thrust of the story is not toward the past but directly to the ever-moving present. Israel's creation faith is a theological commentary on the meaning of existence" (p. 30.). The same might be said of the historical and Wisdom books, and above all of the Prophets and the Psalms.

The reviewer confesses himself bothered by two things which seem to call for further study and clarification. The first is Napier's constant girding at the Documentary theory, while always falling back upon it as a necessity for his own analysis. To say that the textual variants in Gen. 37 and 39:1 are "hardly at all disruptive of the smooth flow and integration of the tale" (p. 98) is really too much; he is closer to the facts when he says (p. 33) that a "relative indifference to concerns of logical consistency" is "characteristic." Granting that documentary analysis alone is insufficient and can be overdone, there is no virtue in throwing out the baby with the bath water.

A second query is raised by sweeping statements like "Israel reads her own experience in Abraham" (p. 66), and "Israel herself shaped, read, understood and interpreted the stories" (p. 71). Napier has good precedents for personifying Israel, but which Israel is he personifying? Apparently he refers here to the priestly theologians of the Persian period. Were the Wisdom teachers not Israel too? Was the pre-Deuteronomic worship not that of Israel? Is the only stage of religion worth considering the final editorial theology of Genesis?

This is a good book because it has an illuminating thesis and provokes questions. It is an essay in Old Testament theology not divorced from its historical and

## THE CHRISTIAN SCHOLAR

cultural matrix. It is interesting and informative, even in the parts which do not bear directly on the main theme. The style is firm, clear and cogent; Napier can write English as well as read Hebrew.

R. B. Y. Scott

### The Editor's Absence

Through a generous grant of the Edward W. Hazen Foundation to Yale University, provisions were made for the appointment of Dr. J. Edward Dirks as Associate Professor of Religion in Higher Education at Yale University Divinity School and as Secretary of the University Commission of the World's Student Christian Federation. The dual appointment provides for major responsibilities in teaching and research as well as travel to university centers around the world on behalf of the common con-

cern of these three organizations focused upon the fundamental issues in the relation of Christian faith and higher learning.

The first period devoted to travel began on March first when Dr. Dirks set out on a four-month visit to Asia. The Editorial Board of *The Christian Scholar* has asked Professor William H. Poteat to serve on its behalf as Associate Editor; he will serve as Editor during Dr. Dirks' absence from the country.

# Interpretation

## A Journal of Bible and Theology

The immediate concern of this issue of *The Christian Scholar* is the abiding concern of *Interpretation*. A quarterly journal, it carries articles by leading biblical theologians and, as a current feature, a series on "The Bible and Modern Religions."



A CHRISTIAN SCHOLAR should be first A BIBLICAL SCHOLAR.

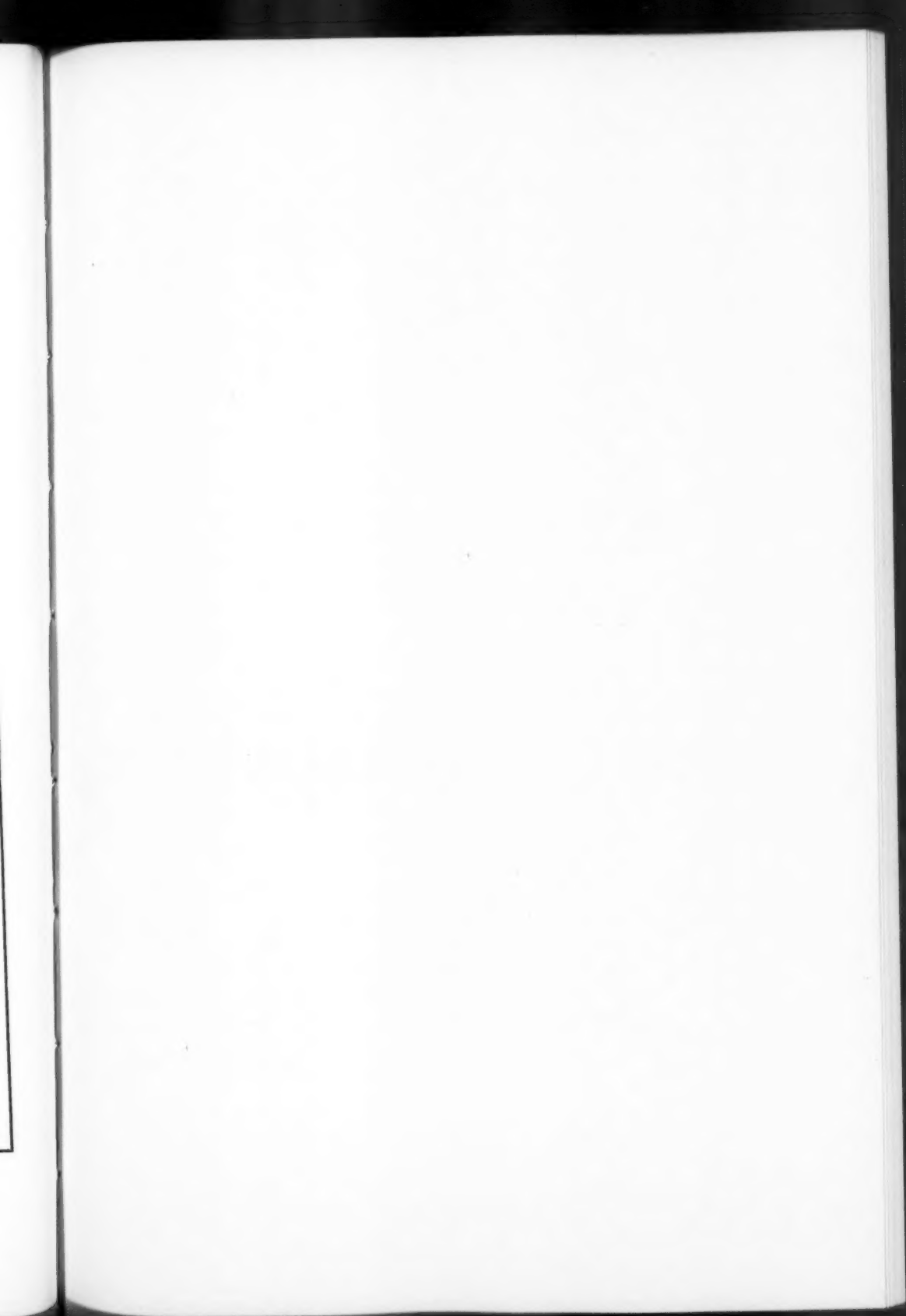
Subscription prices:

\$3.00 yearly

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*Interpretation*

3401 Brook Road,  
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## FACULTY CHRISTIAN FELLOWSHIP BULLETIN

The first issue of a *Faculty Christian Fellowship Bulletin* appeared at the end of January; assuming that finances permit further publication, it should appear approximately once a month during the academic year. This *Bulletin* has been established to set up the lines of communication which are essential to the development of a definable community of Christian concern in the academic world. The first issue is a statement of basic policy of the Fellowship, as developed by the Executive Committee. Subsequent issues will undoubtedly contain other statements proceeding from the whole experience of the Fellowship, but they will serve, too, as the organ of communication for the Fellowship. Thus, activities at the local, regional, and national levels will be brought into a community of discourse with one another. These will not be articles, but reports, suggestions, and statements on problems common to the faculty Christian movement.

This is not a subscription journal; it receives general distribution for promotional purposes, primarily intended for the F.C.F. membership. One college president thinks this kind of bulletin important enough to commit his school to a yearly contribution of \$50 toward its support. Membership of individuals involves no fixed dues; \$1 is minimum to cover clerical and postal expense of a membership; \$5 covers the bare minimum of costs of a membership and a subscription to *The Christian Scholar*; dues of \$10 or more per year represents, in addition, a contribution to the larger expenses of the Fellowship. Write now to the Faculty Christian Fellowship, 257 Fourth Avenue, New York 10, New York, to enroll yourself as a member and to receive the *Faculty Christian Fellowship Bulletin*.

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